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MARION LESTER;

OR,

THE MOTHER'S MISTAKE.

BY

MISS MINNIE S. DAVIS.

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PREFACE.

Upon the literary sea, already teeming with ten thousand lights, we launch our fragile bark. Though simple the offering, it is presented with a sincere desire for good.

The object and bearing of this work we leave the reader to understand from its perusal.

May it awaken thought in a new direction, and save at least one heart from the influence of religious fear.

M. S. D.

Bethel, Vt., *May*, 1856.

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MARION LESTER.

CHAPTER I.

SELECTING A SCHOOL.

"Mr. Lester, do you know anything about the Upton Seminary? I have been talking with Mrs. Jones about it, — you know her girls have been to that school, — and I think it must be a very desirable one for May to go to; don't you think so?"

My father laid down his book in surprise. "Why, my dear, I thought it had been decided a week ago that we should send Marion to the Eldon Institute at Slaton. I have made arrangements with Mr. Benton, whose daughters are going, to take charge of her and Cora during the journey."

Mother's countenance fell; but in a moment she drew her chair to his side, and began, in her sweet, coaxing way, to plead her case. I saw her heart was set upon the change, and I knew that she would at last bring my father to consent to her wishes. "I

dare say," said she, "the Eldon school is an excel lent one; but we know nothing about it, and the 'Jones girls' give such good accounts of the Upton Seminary, that I am quite in love with it."

"Beg your pardon, my dear, but I do know quite as much about the Eldon Institute as the other. Mr. Benton's daughters have been there two years, and speak of it in high terms; and, more than that, I am personally acquainted with the worthy preceptor."

"But it is so far."

"Full a dozen miles nearer than your Upton school, which is one hundred and fifty miles away; but that will make no difference, as she will not come home till the end of her year. I have an objection to the school: it is very sectarian, and every scholar is obliged to attend the church where the professor preaches."

"Ah, that is not so pleasant; but I'll trust Marion's principles, and of course no one would meddle with her religious opinions. The Upton school is so much more popular, — a regular boarding-school, you know, and boarding-schools are always superior to these common academies. And, besides, they have a native Italian master, and my heart is set on having May learn Italian."

Many arguments equally profound did my mother bring forward to uphold her cause; and, at last,

overcome with her logic, my father yielded the point. She looked delighted; but the slight contraction of his brow, as he resumed his book, proved that he did not perfectly coïncide with her feelings. "Father," said I, now speaking for the first time, "is the point settled? Am I to go to Upton instead of Eldon?"

"Your mother is so anxious about it, I suppose I must consent. I will write to Dr. Severe, who is at the head of the school, to see if you can be admitted."

"Dr. Severe! Ah, papa, that name sounds portentous!"

"Nonsense!" said father, laughing. "Now run and inform Cora and her mother of the change; for, of course, you two inseparables must go together."

I dropped my embroidery, sprang for my bonnet in girlish eagerness, and, in less than three minutes, was across the meadow and at the door of Mrs. Eaton's pretty cottage.

Seventeen bright years had circled over my head, and pain and sorrow I only knew by name. The only child of fond and wealthy parents, I had thus far trod a pathway of sunshine and flowers. I had received all the literary advantages afforded by our aspiring village, and, in addition, had studied Latin and mathematics with my father. And now I was to go away to school a year, and then my education would be considered complete. Cora Eaton, my

constant companion since early childhood, was to be my school companion still. Though such intimate friends, we were in many things direct opposites. Her hair was a golden brown, mine ebon; her eyes were heavenly blue, mine matched my jetty tresses. She was gentle and timid, yet gay and light-hearted; I was firm, and at times a bit wilful. She was painfully sensitive to disapproval; but, while I loved approbation, I held to my convictions of right, independent of what the world might say, or even my dearest friends. I loved her fragile beauty, and unvarying sweetness of temper; she leaned upon me as upon an elder sister, with tender confidence.

Cora's mother was a widow in easy circumstances. Her only brother, Alfred, was a young man of twenty-two, and on his second year at college. This Alfred was my beau ideal of manly beauty and excellence. Smile not, gentle reader; what girl of seventeen has not an ideal, though she may never have met it, and perchance never will? Alfred had ever been a kind and attentive brother, and I, as the friend of his sister, received a full share of his boyish attentions. We were very near to each other, — as near as cousins at least.

For fifty miles of our journey we enjoyed the company of Mr. Benton and his daughters; then our ways diverged, and Cora and I travelled alone.

Mary and Emma Benton were amiable, intelligent girls, and we felt as much regret as they expressed, that we were not all going together. Mary, who was three years older than myself, expected to become assistant teacher in the school to which they were going, after a few months more study. At parting, Emma assured us, that, "however much we might like the Upton Seminary, it would be impossible for us to find better teachers, or more agreeable companions, than at Eldon;" and Mary added, with glistening eyes, that "it was the pure moral and religious atmosphere pervading the school which made it so dear to her."

It was a chilling day in autumn, and, towards night, the heavens opened their flood-gates, and the rain fell with a sullen, continuous splash. We were happily unconscious of the state of the weather until we left the warm, light cars, when we received the information that we had half an hour's drive to take in the chill, wet evening. Shivering, and with dread homesickness settling down upon our hearts, Cora and I curled into one corner of the carriage. Our merry driver told stories, and laughed at them himself, but failed to awaken any interest in his hearers until he announced that the large gray building that loomed up in the distance was the seminary.

We were shown into a handsome parlor. It was unoccupied and partially lighted by the rays of a

large hanging lamp seen through an open door. We could see distinctly into the adjoining room, which I concluded was a study; for directly under the lamp was a table covered with huge books, at which sat an elderly gentleman, writing. "I wonder if that is Dr. Severe?" whispered Cora, in slight trepidation.

"Hush! he will come to meet us." But the grave, stern face still bent over the table, and the hand still flew over the page, as though their owner was ignorant of our near presence. Our observations were cut short by the entrance of two ladies, one tall and dark, the other small and very fair. The dark lady introduced herself as Mrs. Winthrop, the preceptress, and her companion was Miss Ingols, the music-teacher. Mrs. Winthrop welcomed us in a stately, condescending manner, while Miss Ingols quietly assisted in removing our many wrappings.

Five minutes were passed in answering matter-of-course inquiries, when the doctor, at the study-table, who had appeared totally oblivious of every surrounding object, suddenly laid down his pen, and, walking directly through the room, shook hands with Cora and myself, calling her Miss Lester and me Miss Eaton. He was glad to see us; hoped that we should be happy there; recommended us to be studious and attentive, and, with the same abruptness with which he had entered the room, he walked

straight back to his study-table and resumed his pen.

Miss Ingols now remarked that she should be happy to entertain the young ladies in her own room, if agreeable to Mrs. Winthrop. The stately lady bowed in acquiescence; so we rose and followed Miss Ingols. It was a delightful room into which we were ushered. A coal fire glowing in an open grate, an elegant piano, a table covered with books, a bright, soft carpet, and an inviting lounge, were objects which my vision took in at one glance, with a sensation of pleasure and relief. Noticing the weariness of my fragile Cora, Miss Ingols drew a stuffed rocker near the fire for her, and gave me an ottoman by her side. Her manners were the most quiet and subdued I had ever seen in any one, and her voice very low and gentle. While we were discussing our supper (which had been brought into the room at her request), she inquired about our studies and former pursuits.

I knew, by the glance which Cora now and then gave me, that she was deeply in love with gentle Miss Ingols; but I had not quite made up my mind about her. She was so wonderfully quiet in her words and manners, so entirely passive, so to speak, that I asked myself if she had any spirit, any life, any soul.

Cora looked so longingly at the piano, that Miss

Ingols guessed her wish, and, with a faint smile, sat down to play. I gazed upon her, wondering if she would play or sing in the same style in which she moved and spoke. She touched the keys dreamily, but the first strain acted like a spell upon her; her face lighted up, her eyes dilated with feeling, her mouth opened, and such melody as gushed from her lips! The instrument was a splendid one, and yet her wondrous voice rose above its tones, and mingled with them, rich and clear. My bosom swelled, and my eyes filled; my heart was thrilled to its lowest depths.

O, yes, she had a soul; an inspired one, I thought, and music was its language!

She left the piano and came back to the fire, exactly as before; upon her subdued countenance was not a trace of the rapt enthusiasm with which she had sung. I did not doubt her now; I was sure I should love her. But she seemed a mystery to me.

In about an hour we started for our own room in fine spirits; our ardor was somewhat damped, however, when Miss Ingols informed us that our apartment was preöccupied by two young ladies, who had been members of the school a long time. How vexing! Cora and I had counted on a room all to ourselves, and now our privacy was to be always marred by strangers. Miss Ingols introduced the two girls, who rose from their books at our entrance, as Miss

Sarah and Miss Helen French, and then left us to get acquainted, she said. But I was too much vexed to be very gracious at first, and the glisten in Cora's eyes spoke of tears near at hand. The young girls, apparently not much prepossessed in our favor, went soberly back to their books. They sat at a pretty round table, which stood near their bed; on the other side of the room were another bed and a similar table, which Cora and I supposed were for our use. We sat down to our table; upon which Miss Sarah rose up and lighted our lamp for us, in a very kind manner. I thanked her, and Cora tried to smile; but that homesick feeling had come back to our hearts with full power. Cora whispered, "Let's unpack our trunks."

"No, dear," I replied; "I have no heart for it." And so my darling leaned her head upon my shoulder, while I tumbled over the school-books on the table. There was a Bible among them, and, by natural impulse, I opened the sacred book. I had read the Bible much with my father, and he had often told me that, though invaluable to the glad and prosperous, it was doubly precious in seasons of depression and grief. I knew a few chapters would be salutary in my present frame of mind; and so Cora and I quietly read from the same page, while our companions across the room perused their lessons in silence.

"Nine o'clock, and I won't study a moment longer!" exclaimed Miss Helen, as a clock near by told the hour. She packed away her books with a great bustle. "Sarah, Sarah, study hours are up; put away your slate."

"Don't bother me so; I must get out this problem first," said Sarah, a little peevishly.

"Now, what if Arthur Willis should hear you speak so shortly; do you think he'd pick up your handkerchief again, and give it to you with such a polite bow?"

"Pshaw! what is Arthur Willis to me?"

"O, nothing, I dare say; though you do think he is the handsomest fellow, with his black hair and eyes, and superb whiskers. Now I would own him handsome if he only wore mustaches. Can't you coax him to, when you get a little better acquainted with him?"

"Do stop your nonsense, Helen," said Sarah, rising, and putting away her books; "it can't be very interesting to our room-mates." The two girls now came and sat near us, and I determined to make amends for my former coldness. Helen opened her eyes very wide as she saw what book I had been reading; and, elongating her pert little face, she asked, in a doleful voice, "Are you pious, Miss Lester?"

The oddity and abruptness of the question confounded me, and I stared at her without a reply.

"I wish you would be sensible," said Sarah, reprovingly. "If Miss Lester is pious, she don't wish to boast of it; and if she is not, of course it is n't pleasant to be quizzed about it."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lester; I meant no offence," said Helen, trying to look sober, but with a wicked twinkle in her blue eye. "I 'm half afraid you are pious, though; but I know Miss Eaton is n't. She loves fun as well as I do, if her face does say 'homesick' so plainly."

Cora laughed, and I laughed too, though I thought Helen a very queer girl. In a few minutes we were talking familiarly together, as if we had known one another a month.

CHAPTER II.

MY SCHOOLMATES.

CORA'S kisses awoke me in the morning. Our room-mates were dressing, and chattering like two magpies; so we sprang from the bed, and commenced our toilet.

Sarah stood at the glass, combing out her fair curls, which I thought almost equal to the matchless ringlets floating round Cora's head. Helen's spirits were effervescing, as on the night before. "Sarah, Sarah, I 'm waiting for the glass!"

"In a minute, dear; let me fix this last curl."

"O, I forgot; you want to look very charming! But, mind you, Arthur Willis is going to be a minister, and, of course, could not be ensnared by such wicked things as curls."

"I am not taking any more pains than usual, I assure you."

"O, no, indeed! not when Mr. Willis sits right opposite you at table, and you think him so hand-

some! Such hair and eyes! — but then he don't wear mustaches! What a pity!"

"Has n't this Arthur Willis, you say so much about, anything to boast of but fine hair and eyes?" I asked, suddenly.

"There, you are interested already!" cried Helen. "O, Sarah, my poor, dear Sarah, what can you do? Here is the accomplished Miss Lester, interested before she has even seen him, and Miss Eaton is far handsomer than you, with curls which throw yours completely into the shade. Alas! my sister will die of a broken heart; for what can she do beside two such charmers?" Here Helen clasped her hands with a half-comic, half-tragic air.

"If Mr. Willis has no other claim to our regard than mere good looks, Miss Sarah need not fear me as a rival," said Cora, laughing.

"Certainly, in that case she will have the field entirely to herself," added I.

Sarah turned from the glass with heightened color. "Helen is always making fun, as you will soon find out; but, in this case, she has no reason, for I am scarcely acquainted with Mr. Willis; and, besides, he is grave and studious, and hardly ever speaks to a girl in school. The professor says he is his best scholar; and he is very proud of him, as are all the ministers. I dare say he would feel quite vexed if

he knew how freely his name was used by such silly girls."

"There goes the breakfast-bell!" cried Helen, "and, as you have finished your grand explanation, I beg leave to lead the way."

Among the many strange faces surrounding me at the breakfast-table, I had no difficulty in selecting him, who I was sure was Arthur Willis. His pale countenance wore an expression of high intellectuality; his hair was dark and wavy, and his eyes were large, black, and mournful. I judged, from his abstracted air, that he had left his mind with his books. He ate hastily, addressing no one.

By my side was a lad of sixteen, with a mirth-loving face. He looked at me keenly, and asked if I had recovered from the effects of my cold ride. I then recognized him as our merry driver of last night, and gave him my hand. "I am called Ed Sanders," he said, by way of introduction.

"And I am Marion Lester, and this is my friend Cora Eaton." He nodded graciously.

There was some quiet mischief going on at our end of the table, and I soon discovered Ed Sanders to be the perpetrator. But he looked grave enough for a deacon, and passed round the bread, or butter, or sugar, with commendable gallantry; while, ever and anon, the girls opposite received whole batteries of sugar-plums, from some mysterious source. A

shower of them fell among Cora's curls, and half a dozen sailed gracefully upon my coffee. Mrs. Winthrop's sharp gray eyes were turned upon us so often that I really feared she would discover the sugar-plum sensation; but Ed performed his part so well, and the girls laughed and winked just in the right time, so that she had not the remotest suspicion of it.

After breakfast and prayers, Cora and I were left alone in the great dining-hall. Soon Mrs. Winthrop appeared, and after delivering a little lecture, and reading a formidable list of rules, she put us under Miss Ingols' care, who was to tell us about our lessons. Miss Ingols soon planned our studies for the day, and left us with the agreeable permission to remain an hour in her pleasant room, and study by ourselves.

The weeks passed quickly away, and we became accustomed to our new mode of life, and were contented and happy. Cora, beautiful, happy-hearted Cora, won all hearts; she was so gay, and yet so gentle; so affectionate and winning! And still I had the satisfaction of knowing that she considered me her first and dearest friend, in spite of the fond and flattering attentions showered upon her.

Dr. Severe was stern, and unbending in his manners, and, though a thorough teacher, I regarded him with actual fear. Mrs. Winthrop (who was the professor's widowed sister) I distrusted; but Miss In-

gols I loved and esteemed. Cora sympathized with these feelings, though she stood much more in awe of Mrs. Winthrop than I did. The other teachers were agreeable and faithful; but, as we saw them only at recitation, they had less influence upon us.

We heard much about a certain Lizzie Williams, who had long been a member of the school. She was now detained at home, on account of her delicate health. I had a curiosity to see this young lady, about whom I heard such varied and contradictory reports. Mrs. Winthrop pronounced her a perfect Christian, a model for us all; and loudly bewailed her absence. Miss Ingols said she was a dear, good girl, and some of the scholars agreed with her, while others shook their heads, and intimated that they thought her overbearing and haughty.

Ed Sanders told me in confidence, one day, that, in spite of her beauty and talents, he disliked her exceedingly. "She was shockingly pious, almost self-righteous," in his opinion.

One morning Helen French, who always contrived to be behindhand, ran into our room some minutes after the rest of us were quietly seated at our lessons.

"O, Sarah!" she exclaimed, "your Miss Piety has come!"

"Whom do you mean? How I wish you would call folks by their right names!"

"How dull you are, Sarah! I mean Lizzie Williams."

"Lizzie Williams!" Sarah's face shone with animation. "Are you sure she has come; have you seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her. You know the room next to Miss Ingols' has been reserved for her. As I went by there just now, John was carrying in her trunk, and Lizzie sat in a rocking-chair by the window. She smiled and tried to speak, but a dreadful fit of coughing prevented her, and she turned her face away and covered it with her handkerchief."

"Poor Lizzie, how I do want to see her! I shan't have a chance to see her until night, unless I run down now a minute. I have a good mind to." Sarah had gone to the door, and stood holding the handle irresolutely.

"I thought it was against the rule to leave our rooms during study hours," said Cora, innocently.

"To be sure it is," said Helen; "but it will do no harm unless she meets Mrs. Particular, which is n't very likely at this time of day."

"I believe I'll venture," said Sarah, and she vanished through the door.

She returned in half an hour, with flushed cheeks and swimming eyes. Helen instantly understood the difficulty, and exclaimed, "O, dear, and so the coast was n't clear, after all?"

"No," answered Sarah, struggling through her tears; "I met the professor himself on the stairs. How he happened to be out of his study at that hour I 'm sure I don't know! But he did n't appear even to see me, though my heart beat so loud I should think he must have heard it. Thanking my stars at my escape, I hurried into Lizzie's room. She was very glad to see me, and we had a nice chat together; but, just as I began to think of coming back, Mrs. Winthrop came into the room. She was very angry with me, and said that for a punishment I must read twenty extra lines in Virgil; and how I am to do it with all my other lessons I don't see!"

"O, dreadful!" cried Helen; "twenty lines, and you have just commenced reading it! How I wish we did n't study Latin! It is a hateful, dead language, not fit for girls to learn."

"I shall never get it all out," said Sarah, despairingly, while her tears fell fast upon the pages of her book.

"I have learned my Italian lesson, and have ten minutes to spare, so I can help you translate it," said I, seating myself by her side.

She looked up gladly through her tears. "How good you are! I will accept your assistance, though I suspect I don't deserve it."

Every evening, between the hours of six and seven,

the pupils were allowed to call upon each other in their rooms. Sarah was eager to have Cora and I become acquainted with her friend, Miss Williams; therefore we took an early opportunity to call upon her. The young lady welcomed us with graceful ease. She was a tall and queenly girl of twenty, with dark eyes and hair. I felt saddened, as I read upon her pale features, in unmistakable language, the assurance that the consumptive's doom would be hers. She was so cordial and agreeable that I could not but be pleased with her. Cora and I both pronounced her very lovable. Sarah looked delighted, but Helen shook her head very knowingly.

The very next evening Lizzie Williams tapped at our door, and was welcomed in with satisfaction. We school-girls did not care about etiquette, but made and returned calls at our pleasure. For a time we conversed pleasantly upon such subjects as were uppermost in our minds. Then Lizzie, who sat by my side, took my hand in hers. "My dear Miss Lester," she said, "have you a hope?"

"A hope!" I repeated, puzzled at her phraseology.

"Yes; a hope in God!"

"Certainly. How could I be without faith and hope in God, when I am constantly receiving such tokens of his love and mercy; and his wisdom and power are manifested in all the works of his hand?

Does not your question insinuate a want of intellectual perception, or moral appreciation, in me?"

"You misunderstand me. I mean, have you a special hope for yourself; do you feel that Christ has accepted you as his own?" Her dark eyes were fixed upon me keenly.

I fully understood her now, and returned her glance with one equally searching. "No, I am not so presumptuous. I do not and cannot merit the special favor of God, though his bounties have ever been showered upon me. I know Christ died for me, therefore I trust him, not myself."

She withdrew her hand, saying, in a changed tone, "I am disappointed in you; I thought I had found a congenial mind, — one who could appreciate and sympathize with my spiritual experience; but I perceive I am mistaken."

After an awkward silence, she continued: "And you, Cora Eaton, do not profess to be a Christian, any more than your friend?"

Cora turned her blue eyes to mine, but the silent answer mine gave her, reässured her, and she said, gently, "I am afraid I am too full of errors and mistakes, to be worthy of the name; but I wish to be a true Christian; I am trying to become one."

"That is it, darling Cora; you do try to be a Christian, and I think you come the nearest to it of any one I know."

"You have a strange manner of speaking, Miss Lester," said Miss Williams, coldly. "I fancy you wilfully misunderstand me!"

I was too proud either to explain or defend myself, and, as she rose to go, I haughtily wished her "good-evening."

"There is Lizzie Williams to the very life!" cried Helen, as the door closed after her. "She is very gracious, and gives her love to those who make great professions, as she does, but is chilly as an iceberg to us unregenerated mortals."

"You wrong her," said Sarah. "I own she is strict in her notions, and wishes to have others conform to her opinions; yet she makes a friend of me, and you know I 'make no profession.'"

"Ah, but you are a subject for hope," said the gay girl, mockingly, "while I, at least, am incorrigible."

CHAPTER III.

INNOCENT AMUSEMENT CONDEMNED AND DEFENDED.

ALFRED EATON often wrote to his sister, always sending a message to me, and sometimes enclosing a half sheet for "sister May," as he often called me. A little before New-Year's we received a missive, which gave us special joy. He was having a few days' vacation, and New-Year's he was to spend with William Justin (his college chum), whose father, Judge Justin, resided about a mile distant from our seminary. On New-Year's eve the judge's lady was to give a party, and William Justin had sent a request for her to invite Cora and myself, for the sake of his friend Alfred.

We were delighted at the prospect of meeting our dear Alfred so soon, and when our notes of invitation arrived, we hastened to obtain Mrs. Winthrop's permission to attend the party. Cora explained the cause of our invitation, and the reason why we were so anxious to go.

The preceptress gravely turned over the little del-

icate, rose-colored notes, and expressed her regret that we had received them.

"I have not seen Alfred for several months," pleaded Cora.

"I presume you both wish to see your friend," said Mrs. Winthrop; "but I disapprove of large parties; I never allow my pupils to attend them. And, besides, the Justins are 'world's' people."

"Are they not respectable people?" I asked.

"O, they are respectable, for aught I know! Judge Justin is an influential man. On the whole, it would n't do to refuse them, though it is much against my principles to let you go. Yes, I suppose I must consent, if you will behave very circumspectly, and return at an early hour."

Thanking her for her permission, though so reluctantly given, we gladly escaped to our own room.

The eventful night arrived, and Cora and I arrayed ourselves in our most becoming attire. Cora was dressed in a light-blue silk, and I thought she needed no other ornament than the rich curls which shaded her snowy neck. I wore a rich crimson cashmere, with a few snow-drops in my hair.

Judge Justin's carriage came for us, and to our great joy we found Alfred within it. It was a happy meeting, and we had so much to say to one another that the ride seemed far too short. As we entered the brilliantly-lighted rooms, I thought Alfred had

grown handsomer and more noble-looking, and a feeling of pride and pleasure thrilled my heart as he drew my arm tighter within his.

After being introduced to the members of the household, we mingled with the guests. The apartments wore an air of elegance and taste I had rarely seen. I soon discovered there were several learned and distinguished men among the various groups. Alfred pointed them out, and related anecdotes of them. I soon missed Cora, and, looking round, saw her leaving the room, leaning on the arm of William Justin. Just then a rich burst of music swelled through the house.

"They have gone to the dancing-hall," said Alfred; "let us join them. Half the young folks are there already, I presume."

Guided by the sounds of the music, we passed through several rooms, until we stood at the door of a spacious apartment, where a company of young people were dancing. Soon Cora's light form met my eye. I knew by her sparkling face that her pulses bounded in unison with the spirit of the scene. She looked surpassingly beautiful, as with inimitable grace she stepped to the stirring music. There was a vacant space near us, which we appropriated, and joined in the graceful exercises with keen zest.

After dancing some time I became weary, and, seeing Cora on the opposite side of the room, Alfred

drew me to a retired seat, where we could converse uninterruptedly. He leaned towards me, and commenced speaking in earnest tones. "Marion, dear Marion," he said, "I had an especial object in planning this meeting. I wished to ask you a question, which most nearly concerns my happiness. I have long loved you, Marion, and longed to call you by a still dearer name than 'sister May.' I have your father's permission to tell you of my love, and now it is for you to complete my happiness."

I will not repeat all the arguments he offered, or the thrilling words he breathed in my willing ear. Suffice it to say that in half an hour we returned to the company, fully, perfectly happy. An additional lustre was radiated from my happy heart upon everything about me. I had long regarded Alfred with more than a sister's tenderness, and now the sentiment was acknowledged and understood, it became enlarged and intensified, fully swaying my whole heart.

When we retired to our chamber, I whispered my precious secret in Cora's ear. The darling girl overwhelmed me with kisses and congratulations, and playfully assured me that she had guessed Fred's feelings, and had left us alone in order to give him an opportunity to "pop the momentous question."

Several days after the party, we received a summons to meet the preceptress in her private parlor.

"It is a bad omen," said Helen, who delivered the message, with a shake of her pert little head; "it is a very bad omen. I'm afraid Mrs. Particular has a heavy charge to bring against you two."

Cora began to look apprehensive, but brightened somewhat when I reminded her that we had never knowingly violated any regulation of the school, and consequently we had nothing to fear.

Mrs. Winthrop received us with an air of stern displeasure. "Young ladies, having given my consent for you to attend that party last week, as you returned at a proper hour, I found no fault. But. since then, I have learned that there was dancing on that occasion, and I have sent for you to inquire if you joined in that sinful amusement?" Seeing we hesitated, she added, sharply, "Do not deny it, girls, for I know the whole story."

Indignation burned on my cheeks, and flashed in my eyes, but restraining myself, I answered, respectfully, "We have neither of us a thought of denying it; we did both dance at the party."

Mrs. Winthrop threw up both hands, and leaned back in her chair with a faint exclamation of horror at my shameless declaration. Cora trembled, and her eyes filled with tears. The expression of feeling was so disproportionate to the occasion, that I looked on, coolly waiting to see what would come of it all.

Mrs. Winthrop recovered herself, and regarded us

with the air of an injured martyr. "By your conduct you have injured my brother, the professor in the institute; you have injured me and every other teacher here; and disgraced every sober, religiously inclined pupil, to say nothing of the disgrace which you have brought upon yourselves. Dancing is a worldly, sinful amusement, never countenanced except by worldly, sinful people. To think that two young ladies under my charge should be induced to indulge in it! I cannot express my shame and grief!"

Really regretting I had offended the good lady's strongest prejudice, I tried to appease her. "I am very sorry to have incurred your displeasure, Mrs. Winthrop, and I assure you, if we had known your objection to dancing, we would willingly have refrained from it." Her proudly-cut features were distorted with passion.

"Marion Lester, you insult me! Did n't know that I had the strongest, the deadliest objection to all vain and trifling amusements? I, who have been professor of religion since a child, who have been accounted an humble Christian these dozen years! Your knowledge of my character and of the character of this institution must be very limited."

I tried to speak, to soothe her with reiterated expressions of regret and apologies, but in vain.

"Do not apologize; such dereliction from propriety

has no apology. My brother, the professor, is very angry, and justly so; but, thinking I could reprove you best, he desired me to do so, and inflict such penalty as I thought" —

"Stop, madam!" I began, with an imperious gesture. I forgot I was a mere school-girl; I forgot I stood before one in authority. There was a proud swelling in my heart, which bade me assert my superiority to such unjust, such petty tyranny. "I respect the opinions of my teachers, and express again my sorrow at offending. We have been taught to consider dancing innocent and healthful, and did not suppose that even professors of religion could object to it, in a private house, with refined and moral company. And as our own parents sanction a moderate indulgence in the amusement, I beg, madam, you will say nothing about the penalty you choose to inflict."

Cora checked her tears, which had been flowing freely, and gazed upon me, half in amazement, and half in fear.

Mrs. Winthrop caught her breath, and looked at me in profound astonishment. So new was opposition to her, so unused was she to anything but the most flattering respect and unquestioning submission, that she half doubted her own ears. After a pause, in which her countenance materially changed its expression, she turned to my trembling friend, Cora, and said: "You have manifested contrition, therefore I

will overlook your error, and receive you again into my favor; but you, Marion, are obstinate. Remember, I regard you with extreme displeasure. Young ladies, you may return to your books."

"O, Marion, how could you, how did you dare speak so to Mrs. Winthrop?"

"You know, Cora, dear, I never oppose rightful authority; but I'll not be tyrannized over, not even by the powers that be. I didn't mean to be impudent, though."

"You was n't exactly impudent, but you looked so superior, and spoke with such authority, that I was frightened."

"But it had its effect," laughed I, "for 'Young ladies, go to your books,' was the end of the conference."

Time passed. Meanwhile, Cora and I progressed rapidly in our studies, and gained in the friendship of those about us. I conceived a strong attachment for Miss Ingols, and she seemed fully to reciprocate the sentiment. I sat alone with her oftener than any other scholar, generally at her request. There was a fascination for me in all her ways, though she was as unlike as possible my energetic, impulsive self. Always quiet and placid as when I first saw her; always wearing an expression of subdued melancholy upon her features; never smiling except a faint,

sweet smile, which was like a tiny ripple on the face of a moonlit lake; she ever seemed a touching mystery to me. I instinctively felt that beneath that unruffled exterior lay slumbering passions and yearnings; that she had a lofty, noble soul; — and in music only did that hidden soul ever shine upon her face. I have watched with painful anxiety to catch even a faint trace of emotion upon her exquisitely moulded features; but never, in the most unguarded moment, was pleasure or pain, approval or anger, mirrored there. Only when her flying fingers awoke slumbering melody, did her soul arise and pour out its beauty in her wondrous voice. I felt that she was good, that a strange mystery shadowed her life; and for this I loved her.

Cora was a favorite everywhere. Even Lizzie Williams loved and caressed her. And Lizzie was at times gracious and affectionate towards me, in spite of the imaginary gulf which she placed between us.

Said Cora to me one day, "There is something I cannot understand; something which has puzzled me ever since we came to this school. Every one here is very religious, or very frivolous, — almost every one, I mean. They run to extremes. Those who are religious are always grave and solemn, and hold themselves off from and above the others. Most of

the rest make mock of religion, and despise those professing it."

"Yes, Cora, I have noticed this often, and with great pain. There are a few exceptions; Miss Ingols is equally kind and considerate to all; and one or two are like Sarah French, half-way between, wishing to get religion, but dreading to give up all pleasures and amusements."

"Yes, Sarah is a good girl; but Helen often shocks me with her strange speeches, as do some others. The other day Ed Sanders said to me, and I am sure he is a kind-hearted, well-meaning fellow, that he hoped I should never get to be religious. For his part, he hated religion; there was no reality in it; people only wore it as a cloak to hide their faults and selfishness. I asked if he thought Miss Ingols was one of these; he admitted that there might be something in her professions, but he was certain there was n't another like her."

"Did n't you refer to Arthur Willis?"

"I spoke of him, and Ed turned up his eyes very knowingly, and declared that Arthur Willis had n't any more religion than his old hat! he was n't so pious as some folks would like to have him."

"What an idea! I thought everybody liked Arthur Willis."

"So does Ed Sanders; he says he is the best fel-

low in the world, but something will come to light about him, of which few have even dreamed."

"What can he mean?"

"I 'm sure I don't know. I wish he would n't talk so about religion and its followers; it shocks my reverence, and shakes my confidence."

This conversation set me to pondering on the painful extremes presented by the subject. The gloom and asceticism, the self-righteous, "I-am-holier-than-thou" spirit of the professed followers of Christ, on the one hand; on the other, light mockery, contempt, or indifference, for sacred things.

I had been taught to regard religion as essential, and the possession of it a most joyful thing; but now my mind was crossed with doubt and troubled with perplexity. I had, hitherto, seen religion dressed in light and beauty; now it was all changed; my heart was frightened at the gloom it wore, and, shrinking from the darkness shrouding it, I sought refuge in the sunshine of earthly love. My parents grew nearer and dearer to me, though we were separated by time and distance; more proudly, more fondly did I watch Cora's increasing beauty; but how can I tell of the idolizing love which enshrined one image in my heart! him who had the keeping of my young affections!

God was described to me in majesty, in power, and

might, and terror; and I was told to love him supremely.

My heart rebelled, and I leaned confidingly upon an arm of flesh. Ah! in bitterness of spirit was I to learn, that though earthly love is sweet and precious. only Infinite love is a safe haven for the tempest-tossed and heavy-laden spirit.

In my own home, under the guidance of my father, who was a true and consistent Christian, I ever hailed the Sabbath with delight. Then it was a day of serene and elevated pleasure; a day of praise, of thanksgiving, and holy meditation. Then with rapture did I contemplate the love of the All-Father.

A few months had wrought a great change in me. Not that I had entirely forgotten my former "faith and hope in God;" not that the memory of other joyful, peaceful days was wholly lost; but the present seemed to hide the past; a mist had risen between my present and former self. I was sometimes critical and scorning; sometimes hoping, often fearing, always doubting.

Here, Sunday was the most tiresome, oppressive day of the week. Besides attending public services three times each Sabbath, there was a long series of Bible lessons, catechetical classes and prayer-meetings. These duties, followed up with intense ardor by our teachers, proved exhausting to my physical nature, and highly detrimental to my mental powers. Each

Sunday night I retired to bed inexpressibly weary, and painfully depressed in spirits.

Dr. Severe ministered at the church where all the pupils attended worship. His cognomen seemed singularly appropriate, and in the pulpit did he appear most fully to merit it. His style was hard and severe; but I listened with respect, for I gave him at least the credit of sincerity. Often would he launch forth into loud and startling denunciations, and thrilling appeals for the sinner to "flee from the wrath to come." In language which I cannot paint, would he thunder forth the terrors of the Lord; then, in solemn, awful tones would he warn the impenitent.

Thrilled with horror and half-disgust, have I often turned to note the effect of his words. The audience would generally be calm and unruffled; many would look indifferent, some abstracted, and a few intensely satisfied, as though the burning words were bread to their hungry souls; but here and there one, the tender and sensitive, would tremble like reeds before the blast.

Cora was one of these; often would her cheeks blanch and her eyes dilate with horror, and once she leaned her head upon my shoulder with a hysterical sob.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS INGOLS.

One windy day our stove smoked fiercely; therefore we all took our books and sat by the dining-room fire. Soon Ed Sanders came in from a recitation, balancing three or four books upon his head. He nodded gayly; — "See, girls," he cried, "this is my method of keeping my lessons from flying away, after I have managed to get them into my brain! The heft of my geometry, Latin grammar, and lexicon, — all weighty books, I assure you, — effectually prevents the escape of any poor little lesson; and if I can never again recall a word of it, I have the satisfaction of knowing it is somewhere in my head."

We all smiled at his nonsense, and made room for him by the fire; for he was a general favorite with the girls, he was always so good-humored and merry. For a time we quite forgot our books, and laughed and talked with Edwin, who was in his funniest mood. Then I suddenly recollected we were breaking the

rule by talking in study hours, and withdrew to the window, and resumed the study of my lesson.

Ed Sanders told such amusing stories that the girls were convulsed with merriment, and Helen, forgetting all restraint, laughed loudly. In a moment the door opened, and Miss Ingols advanced into the room. Instantly the laughing group became silent and abashed. Self-condemnation was written on every face; not that Miss Ingols' manner expressed reproof or displeasure, but we were ashamed of our thoughtlessness. "I am sorry to see this," she said, in her low and gentle tones; "have you forgotten there is a penalty attached to every rule? or perhaps you are of those who are content to do 'eye-service?'" then, observing me by the window, she added, "I am glad there is one here who appears to have a stronger sense of duty than the rest."

There was a slight struggle in my mind, for I valued her good opinion very highly; but, scorning to receive unmerited praise, I rose and said, boldly, "You give me too much credit; I had just thought of my duty, and retired by myself to study, when you came in. I deserve to share in the reproof and punishment of the rest."

"No," said Edwin, stepping forward, "I am the only one to blame. I told stories to make the girls laugh, and I suppose they could n't help it; so, Miss

Ingols, please to excuse them, and let me suffer the penalty alone."

Miss Ingols smiled her own peculiar smile, so seldom seen upon her face, but which being once seen could never be forgotten. "Such an exhibition of candor and generosity is very gratifying to me," she said, "and, believing you will all be more careful in future, I will gladly pass over this departure from order." So saying, she left the room as quietly and gently as she came in.

Our gratitude was spoken by a few expressive glances, and then, without a word, we turned to our books. At noon Edwin came to me, and said, "If all Christians were like Miss Ingols, I should be inclined to think there was something in religion; she is so kind and good."

The girls all gathered around us, and heard the closing of his sentence. "O, yes; she is so kind and good!" echoed every one.

"But," said Helen, "she distresses me, for all that."

"How so?" queried I.

"She is so immovable. It would actually be a relief if she should even scold a little, now and then, just for a change. Did she ever laugh, or did you ever see her change the sad, sweet expression of her face?"

We all agreed that we felt somewhat as she did,

yet she was very lovely for all that. "I have sometimes thought," said Sarah, "that she must have had a great affliction in early life, and it is the constant memory of it which makes her so quiet and sad."

Every one assented to this; it was a very reasonable supposition.

At this moment Arthur Willis sauntered into the room. His countenance brightened as he noticed our little group, and he came forward and saluted us with graceful courtesy. Arthur could be very brilliant and engaging when he chose. He was so now, and a most animating conversation followed his addition to our circle. At length Sarah changed the topic: "Before you came in, Arthur, we were speaking of Miss Ingols' singularly quiet manners, which never alter at any circumstance. We all agreed that the memory of some early affliction must be the cause of it; do you think so?"

I regretted Sarah's question, for the young man instantly assumed an abstracted air, which was somewhat peculiar to him. "Yes," he said, as if talking to himself, "Miss Ingols is singular; I should judge by her ways that she had no sensibilities."

"But what do you assign as the reason for her peculiarity?" persisted Sarah.

"I think it is religion."

"Arthur Willis!" I exclaimed, in unlimited surprise.

He turned towards me and said, deprecatingly, "It is only my opinion, Marion. I fully believe religion to be the cause of her touching melancholy. The hope, the joy, the light, is crushed from her heart!" He walked slowly away, with his arms folded behind him and his head down, apparently absorbed in some profound speculation.

We stood looking after him in blank surprise. Helen pouted. "I say you are too bad, Sarah; if you had n't asked him about Miss Ingols' queer ways, he might have stayed with us till dinner-time, and it is n't often that Arthur Willis chooses to play the agreeable."

"How strangely he talked and acted!" said Sarah. "He has changed very much. A few months ago he pored over his books night and day; now he has given up two studies, and spends half his time in lounging about. He has grown odd and moody."

"Girls," said Edwin, "I beg you never to repeat what he said; it might injure his reputation, and he is going to be a minister, you know." Then, rolling up his roguish black eyes, he folded his arms and bowed his head, in imitation of Arthur, and marched after him.

CHAPTER V.

NATURE. — RELIGIOUS EXCITEMENT.

"It is as unwise to overtask the religious sensibilities, as to exhaust the mental or bodily powers. * * * It is not the aim of Providence to develop the Christian life in the soul by a succession of spasms. It is a growth." — *Records of Bubbleton Parish.*

SPRING had come! Light and beauty flooded the earth; melody and fragrance filled the air. My heart leaped up to meet the embrace of renovated nature, and drank in her heavenly influence. Brooding doubts and fears all fled away, and in their stead came joy and hope. It was the smile of reviving nature alone which had restored my wonted trust and lightness of heart. The vivifying air seemed to my sensitive ear whisperings of love from the Father's throne. The birds warbled, and the burden of their song was love. Everywhere, in everything, were the love and wisdom of the Infinite visible.

Nature is a true religious teacher; by her we can never be deceived or confused. "The heavens

declare the glory of God. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." The Bible is often read with preconceived ideas and prejudices; man's vagaries and speculations confound the Word of God, and cruel and selfish dogmas warp the human mind. But the simple, the unlettered, the veriest child, can read untaught from Nature's open book. Love is its universal language, and power and wisdom shine on every page. The religion it teaches is one of joy and gladness, love and trust.

One Saturday afternoon, in the latter part of April, with spirits light and free, I joined a company of my schoolmates for a ramble in the woods. For several days I had been sad and anxious, for the roses on my darling Cora's cheeks were fading, and the fitful lustre of her eye was painful to behold. She "was perfectly well," she said, "though perhaps not quite so strong as usual."

"But you cough, Cora."

She insisted that was nothing; it was so very slight it did not annoy her in the least. If she coughed like Lizzie Williams she might, indeed, take alarm.

Her reference to Lizzie Williams made me sadder than before. Poor Lizzie had wasted away until she was a mere shadow, and the physicians said that, though she might live through the warm months, she

must certainly fade and die with the autumn flowers. And yet she clung to active life with strange tenacity; she remained at school, and tried to study, though often too weak to hold a book in her skeleton hand. Lizzie was an orphan, and perhaps that was the reason why she was permitted to remain at school when she so much needed the retirement of home.

These thoughts saddened me, and the fear that Cora might fade and pine as Lizzie had done, sent keen anguish to my heart.

But on this bright spring day every trace of sadness was banished from my mind. The tide of life flowed so freely in my veins, and so joyously did my heart bound at the magic touch of spring-time, I felt that Cora, too, must grow strong and glad in the glorious sunshine.

Cora and I wandered from the rest. At length, very weary, my friend sat down at the foot of a towering oak. I scarcely observed her, so enraptured was I with the fascinating scene. My enthusiasm burst forth in words. "See, Cora, the deep, deep blue of the sky, and how sweetly the delicate green of the foliage blends with it! Was the sunshine ever so bright before? Hear the birds sing; they are almost mad with joy. And there — O, Cora, as I live, there 's a clump of violets half hid by that mossy old stump!" I was quite a child in my

demonstrations, as I sprang to secure the floral treasure.

"Here, dearest Cora, I give them to you, the first flowers of spring. Just smell their delicious perfume." But my pleasure was not reflected in the eyes of my friend; they were overcast with tears, and her cherub lips quivered with suppressed emotion. Cora in tears when spring smiled so beautifully upon her! She who loved nature with the intensity of which such sensitive spirits as hers only are capable! The violets so eagerly appropriated, now fell uncared for to the ground. I held the dear girl to my heart, and kissed the tears from her sweet eyes.

"You are sick, darling, and I was so selfish I did not see it before."

"O, no, I 'm not sick; it isn't that!"

"Yes, you must be unwell, or you 'd not look so mournful this bright day. When did we ever take a ramble before, in which you did not outrun me, and sing, and laugh, and find all the violets before I could spy one? I must write to your mother, and she will send for you to go home and stay until you get back your lost roses."

"Now, dear May, don't persuade me that I am sick, for I am sure my health does not suffer in the least, though my spirits do. Marion, there is a weight upon my heart; I am wretched."

"How can that be, Cora? I know of nothing

which should make you unhappy. I fear this is a morbid state of mind, and wrong to indulge in. You have ever delighted in spring, why should you not now? To enjoy our blessings with thankful hearts, is the only way we can show our gratitude to the great Giver."

A shade of real anguish crossed her features; it was touching to see that look upon her face, which had ever reflected a heart all sunshine and peace. "O, dear friend," she exclaimed, "you will think me very wicked, — I 'm afraid I am, — but I can't help it! This light and beauty make me sad; it all seems a dreadful mockery, a gilded show! Spring does n't look as it once did to me."

I stood looking upon her in sorrow and perplexity. Gradually a light dawned upon my mind. Remembering the doubts and fears which so shortly ago had oppressed me, I thought how much more her sensitive nature must be affected by the religious atmosphere around us. I began to comprehend the state of her mind, and to deplore it. Meditating what course to pursue, I passed my arm about her, and proposed to walk back.

As we passed along, every step displaying new graces, my spirit caught an inspiration, and I discoursed with an eloquence which surprised myself of the wisdom and goodness, of the infinite love, of Him who ordained the seasons, and spread over the fair

earth such a mantle of beauty. I quoted from Scripture, and from the words of our mutual friend and brother, Alfred, whom we had often heard expatiate most feelingly upon the blessed assurance which nature gives, of the tender and merciful character of the Creator. As I thus talked, I had the satisfaction of seeing Cora's countenance brighten. When we came out from the woods, and beheld the sun going down behind a splendid mass of golden and rose-colored clouds, her eyes sparkled with their wonted lustre, and her lips parted in a glad smile.

Just then our companions came running to find us. They had woven an exquisite wreath of tiny leaves and blossoms, and were loudly calling upon one another to choose a queen.

"Let us crown Cora Eaton!" exclaimed one, "she is the loveliest of us all."

"Yes, let Cora be our queen!" cried another, "she is so modest and good!"

"Yes, crown Cora! crown Cora!" echoed many voices.

And so the pretty wreath was placed upon the head of my blushing, yet delighted friend. Her face was lit with smiles as she gracefully received the innocent and affectionate tribute to her beauty. My heart swelled with pleasure as I saw that all doubt and sorrow were exorcised, for the time, at least, from her loving heart.

O, that a shadow had never again enshrouded my precious Cora! O, that that tender plant, above all others, had been spared the rude shock of that storm which bows the spirit in the dust!

We were not destined to enjoy much communion with Spring, for all that time which should have been spent in exercising in the open air, was now devoted to religious meetings. The revival element was at work in our midst. Dr. Severe redoubled his zeal. His pulpit efforts were more pointed and definite than ever, and his lectures in school more frequent and energetic.

Mrs. Winthrop was in her element, as she mingled with the scholars, exhorting, advising and reproving, with a proud satisfaction. She resolved there should be a "great awakening" in the school, and she labored for that end with untiring assiduity. During the week between the spring and summer terms there was to be a great religious meeting in that place, and her soul's desire was to fit and prepare as many of her pupils as possible to join the church at that eventful season.

Miss Ingols also labored for the same end, but in an essentially different manner. Through affectionate persuasion and gentle entreaty, she exercised a much greater influence than either of her coadjutors in the work.

Sarah French was one of the first to be influenced by the "awakening" power, and even Helen was at times grave and subdued. A marked change was visible in Cora; she was nervous, almost irritable. She was restless at night, and languid and moody by day. I saw with pain that her health was suffering, though she denied it, and was half-indignant if I intimated that she was unwell.

I cannot exactly describe my feelings at this time. I was distressed and perplexed. I was convinced that the manner in which my schoolmates "got religion," as they expressed it, was too hasty to be lasting. I felt that the excitement was unnatural; there was too much profession, too much confusion, to meet with my favor; and, yet, I knew instinctively that all my strength of mind and force of character must be brought to bear against this mighty influence, else I should be swept away in its irresistible current.

Almost every night for a week there had been a prayer-meeting, a conference, or some gathering of the whole school, in order to keep up the religious excitement. On a certain evening I had determined with myself to remain quietly in my room, and, if possible, to induce Cora to stay with me. Contrary to my expectations she willingly consented; she was "so tired," she said, that she should like a quiet evening once more.

To my vexation, two of our schoolmates called into

our room just before the hour for conference to commence. (These meetings were all holden in the great schoolroom.) The young ladies were shocked that I should think of such a thing as absenting myself from the conference, and begged me to change my determination. I was resolute. "I have not had a decent lesson for a week, and I think it my duty to attend more closely to my studies."

Helen laughed. "Now, I like it first-rate; it is a fine way to pass over my lessons. If I can't recite well, I only look as pious as I can, and murmur something about prayer-meeting or conference, and that is the end of it."

Edna Marsh looked upon her in cool disdain, and pronounced her a vain, giddy flirt.

Helen took fire at this, and snappishly declared she had rather be vain and giddy, than to pretend to be so mighty pious and good, as some folks did.

Edna colored, but did not deign a reply. She said no more to me; evidently my firm expression disheartened her; so she attacked Cora. "You will go with us, won't you, dear Cora? What would Mrs. Winthrop say at your absence? Lizzie Williams wants you to sit with her. Come, now, that's a good girl."

Cora looked from her to me irresolutely. I answered for her, "No, she is going to stay with me." But Edna took her hand, and was leading her off perforce. "Now, Cora," I pleaded, "you ought not to

go to-night; you are tired and nervous. So much excitement is bad for you; it is unnatural and unhealthful. Really, I shan't let you go."

But Cora was over-persuaded, and, kissing my forehead, said she must brave my authority. I would not return her caress, for I was much vexed; nor would I look at her again, though I was conscious that she turned back with a wounded expression as she left the room.

Angry at what I considered perversity in Cora, and still more grieved than angry, oppressed with loneliness and disappointment, I laid my head upon the table, and yielded to a burst of tears. After some moments spent in the indulgence of my emotions, I hastily committed my lesson, and then retired to rest before the return of my room-mates.

I was awakened in the night by low, suppressed sobbings. Turning my head, I beheld Cora sitting up in bed, in a most forlorn and despairing attitude, and rocking her body backwards and forwards. I started up in alarm, and besought her to tell me the cause of her distress. She did not alter her position, nor cease her piteous moaning. Shaking her by the shoulder, I implored her to look up, and not weep so wildly.

The full moon shone in through the parted curtain, and I could distinctly see her face as she slowly turned it towards mine. Its expression caused my

heart to quiver with an undefined fear. Every feature was convulsed with agony; her dove-like eyes were red and fearfully distended, and the veins in her delicately-arched throat swollen almost to bursting.

"Cora, darling, what is the matter? Are you sick? has any one injured you? or perhaps you have had a frightful dream, and are not yet quite awakened from it?"

"Dream!" she repeated in a thrilling whisper. "It seems like an awful dream; but it is n't, for I have n't slept. I don't dare go to sleep, for I might die before I should wake! And I have n't made my peace with God! I am so wicked, so wicked! O, Marion, what shall I do?" She clung to me convulsively, as though I could save her from some threatened danger.

"Calm yourself, dear Cora; you are not wicked; you never committed a wilful sin in your life."

"O, yes I am!" she persisted. "My heart is dreadfully sinful and depraved; and I don't know how to get a new heart! I 'm afraid I never can, I am so wicked, so dreadful wicked!" She resumed her former position of abject despair, moaning and sobbing like a sick babe.

Trembling for the sanity of my friend, I rose up in haste, to get some nervine from a little medicine-case which my thoughtful mother had placed in my trunk. By dint of coaxing and scolding, I succeeded

in inducing her to swallow a portion, and then, rocking her like an infant in my arms, I soothed her with every endearing and encouraging word. At length she fell asleep, and I laid her head upon the pillow.

Then, in bitterness of spirit, did I weep over my poor wounded flower. How I reproached myself for my momentary unkindness the evening before! Poor child! she was not accountable; for a strange fascination dwelt in that very excitement which was a bane to her life.

Can this be the effect of real religion? Does it make the pure and innocent hearted shrink with terror and alarm? Can the message brought by Jesus fill the sensitive and loving soul with bitterness and woe? Is such the religion I must seek ere I can be saved? Thus I queried, in sadness and doubt, as the night waned.

Cora slept late in the morning. I told our roommates she was sick in the night, and they stepped lightly and spoke in whispers, fearing to awake the pale sleeper. After breakfast, I found her up, but languid and depressed. Mrs. Winthrop and Miss Ingols both came in to inquire for her health. One brought a dose of medicine, and the other a bunch of flowers. They told her to do nothing, but remain quiet all day. "You may stay in my room to-day, or sit with Lizzie Williams; she would be glad of your company," said Miss Ingols.

"Yes," added Mrs. Winthrop, "do anything you please, only be sure and get well enough to attend our meeting this evening."

I said nothing, while I inwardly resolved that she should not attend the meeting if I could prevent her.

After tea, I managed to have Cora in our own room. I persuaded her to lie down, and, to my great satisfaction, she soon fell asleep. Edna Marsh called again at our door. "I suppose, Miss Lester," she said, "you will not join our prayer-meeting to-night; but, of course, Cora will do so?"

"I think she will not," I replied, pointing to the beautiful slumberer. "She has been quite unwell to-day, and has just fallen asleep."

"She will probably awake soon. I will wait for her, for I know she will be disappointed if I do not. It can't hurt her to go to the meeting, as she will not have to go out of doors."

"I am sure it would hurt her, and I shan't let her go; therefore, I beg you not to wait."

"Indeed! you appear to have great authority here," sneered Edna.

"Whether it be rightful authority or not, I mean to maintain it on this occasion," retorted I, with spirit. "Cora was dreadfully excited last night, and I know that to be the entire cause of her illness to-day. I mean to keep her as quiet as possible until she is stronger in body and mind."

"I suppose it will do no good to dispute with you," said Edna, spitefully; "so I will leave; but I must confess I think your influence very pernicious;" and, with a disagreeable smile, she turned away.

Sarah and Helen, who had remained silent during our colloquy, now rose to follow her. Helen paused a moment to look affectionately upon the sleeping girl. "Poor Cora," she whispered, "she does look very pale; I'm glad, Marion, you sent that disagreeable Edna away, for I can see she is bound to make a convert of her. Now, Cora and I are alike in some things. We both like fun and frolic; but Cora is so sensitive and confiding, that she takes every ridiculous thing that's said about religion as pure law and gospel; and I do believe, if Dr. Severe should tell her it was wicked for her to have any heart at all, she'd think 't was just so. Excitement don't hurt me, — it does me good; and I a'n't obliged to believe any more of the preaching than I'm a mind to."

"Dear Helen, don't talk so!" said Sarah, with a sigh; "I am afraid it is very wrong."

On the morrow, Cora was quite like herself, thanks to a night of uninterrupted repose. I rejoiced in my friend's improved looks, unconscious of the storm hovering on the verge of my horizon.

"I am glad we can stay peaceably in our own rooms, for once," said Helen, that night. "I'm heartily sick of these everlasting meetings. But you, poor Marion,"

she continued, with a sympathizing face, "have got to join a conference-meeting not of the most agreeable nature, I fear. I have just been called into Dr. Severe's study, where he, and Mrs. Winthrop, and Miss Ingols, were all seated in great state. They wished to know if I knew why you had absented yourself from the evening meetings; and, also, if I thought you had tried to influence any of the scholars against them. I assure you, dearest May, I was careful not to commit you, and only admitted that you had persuaded Cora to remain with you one night, on account of her illness."

"Is that all they said?" I asked, in some apprehension.

"No. The doctor bade me request Miss Lester to go directly to him, as he wishes to hold some conversation with her."

The faces of my companions expressed anxiety and sympathy. Cora really looked alarmed, so fearful was she that she was the cause of my trouble. I did not wait for any condolence, however, but went directly to the professor's study.

"I venture to say this comes of that tattling, spiteful Edna Marsh!" was the indignant exclamation of Helen, as I closed the door.

I tried to wear a dignified, unembarrassed air, but my self-possession failed me as I crossed the threshold of the doctor's sanctum. The doctor adjusted his

glasses, and gazed at me in a sort of grave wonder. Mrs. Winthrop threw upon me a quick repellant glance from her sharp eyes, and curled her lip as though I was an object of scorn. Miss Ingols' face was hidden by her hand, which she did not remove once during the whole interview.

An ominous silence reigned, as I sat down with a loudly-beating heart. Dr. Severe's harsh voice, as it broke the silence, seemed to my frightened ears louder and more grating than ever.

"I wish to converse with you," he said, "on a very important subject, apparently a subject which you regard lightly, but which is truly momentous. Impelled by a desire to build up Christ's kingdom on earth, wishing to save as many as possible from endless death, I have, with my assistants, striven to awaken the hearts of my pupils to the interests of religion. And I am happy to say I have, in a measure, succeeded; for several already have given signs of a hopeful conversion, and many more are awakened to a sense of their danger. But one scholar, one obstinate, unrepentant child, may counteract much of this good influence. Such a person may, directly or indirectly, either by words or example, prevent her companions from seeking Christ, and thus imperil their souls' salvation. Do you know such a one? or have you no idea of your great accountability for every word and act of your life?"

I tried to reply, but the words died on my lips. He continued, with still greater severity:

"If your natural heart, which is totally depraved and sinful, causes you to be careless of your own salvation, why should you prevent others from seeking eternal life?"

I now rallied from the effect of his absurd and uncalled-for accusations, and answered with considerable dignity: "I would not be careless of my own salvation, which I know is of infinite importance; much less have I attempted to deter others from obtaining salvation. You are mistaken, sir, in imputing such thoughts or actions to me."

"Why, then, did you keep away from our evening meetings?" asked Mrs. Winthrop, quickly. "Why did you repeatedly urge Cora Eaton to remain with you? And last night did you not overpower the wishes of one deeply interested in her eternal welfare, and send her away most insultingly? What do you mean by such phrases as 'unhealthful, unnatural excitement?'"

"First tell me why you tired so soon of our religious meeting?" asked the doctor, in a grave, authoritative way, very unlike his sister's taunting, half-triumphant manner.

"I thought they took too much time from my studies. I could not learn my lessons properly unless I sat up nearly all night."

"Intellectual education is important," he said, rather evading my direct answer to his question; "but it sinks into insignificance when compared to the interests of religion. I think your reason shows little respect for the judgment of your teachers, and sets your own will above theirs. Was your object, in telling your friend Cora so much about 'dangerous excitement,' merely to keep her from the meetings so that she could study better?"

"No, sir."

"What, then, was your object?"

I dreaded the reception which I feared my answer would meet. Hesitatingly I said: "Cora was very nervous and excitable, and I thought she needed rest and quiet. I really feared she would become sick if her mind remained in such a state of agitation —"

"And so you tried to frighten her by talking about dangerous excitement!" interrupted Mrs. Winthrop. "You went so far as to say that her indisposition yesterday was the effect of a highly-wrought state of mind! What ignorance! what perversity!"

"Truly my sister may say 'What ignorance, what perversity!'" said the doctor. "Cora was in a most desirable state of mind. Her agitation was the striving of the Spirit with her natural heart, and the result might have been a glorious one had you not interfered. I cannot express my regret. I fear your influence is pernicious. Through your own admission,

as well as from other sources, do I arrive at this conclusion. If you continue to make such strange and injurious remarks to your companions, or still keep away from our religious meetings, I shall think it my duty to remove you entirely from the society of your friend Cora; in short, give you a room to yourself, with no companion whom you can contaminate. I will wait a few days, to give you time to retrieve your character, hoping, in the mean time, your heart will be awakened to repentance and newness of life."

He rose, as a sign that he had done with me. I left the room with streaming eyes, and a heart swelling with wounded feeling and a deep sense of injustice.

Miss Ingols must have followed me quickly, for before I had gained my door, her arm was about me, and she drew my head upon her bosom. "Dear Marion," she whispered; "don't take it so much to heart. I know, however much you may have mistaken your duty, you meant no harm. I understand you better than they. Only do right now, and they will know you as I do."

I thanked her, but could say no more, so violent was my emotion.

"God grant that this circumstance may not confirm your prejudices against religion! I beseech you, Marion, to heed the instructions given you. Perhaps you may yet obtain the 'pearl of great price.'"

The hall was dark, and I could not see her face; but there was an energy in her tones I never had heard before, and the cheek pressed to mine was wet with tears.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW METHOD, WHICH PROVES MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THE FORMER.

I WAS unhappy. My first impulse was to write to my parents, requesting them to take me home. But second thoughts convinced me of the impropriety of that course. My father and mother had just started on a tour through the Western States, which would occupy several months; therefore our house was shut up. I did not wish to pain my parents, as I knew it would, if they were aware of all the circumstances surrounding me; and of course I could not, nor did I wish to go to my now lonely home.

Therefore I resolved to remain, to perform my duty, and be patient and submissive. I would outlive the aspersions of those who so misunderstood me, and prove them false by my uprightness of conduct.

Cora continued in the same fitful, excited state. Often at midnight did she weep upon my bosom, bemoaning her imaginary or exaggerated sins, and shrinking from the wrath of God. At such times I

would soothe her as best I could, and afterwards keep my own counsel, for experience had taught me to be discreet. In every minute particular I strove to meet the wishes of my teachers, and yet Mrs. Winthrop was cold and severe; and sometimes, when addressing the scholars, the doctor would make some cutting remark, so personal and rebuking that my cheeks would tingle and my eyes swell with coming tears.

Between the hours of nine and eleven I practised on Miss Ingols' piano, while she gave lessons in another part of the house. On one occasion I took my history with me, and after my practice I ensconced myself on the wide, sunny window-seat, to study. The adjoining room was Lizzie Williams', where the pale invalid sat all day, in a large rocking-chair, surrounded by her books. The door communicating between the two rooms was slightly ajar, and I distinctly heard some persons enter Lizzie's room. I recognized the voices of Mrs. Winthrop and Miss Ingols, but did not heed the conversation until the sound of my own name arrested my attention, and I became the unwilling auditor of their colloquy.

"To be sure, since the occasion to which you refer, Marion Lester has attended every meeting, and I have heard no more of her injurious speeches; but still I think her influence is to cool the zeal of many of her companions. When all the rest are crying and praying about her, she sits as immovable as a statue.

Now, if she had got religion, it would look very proper in her; but, as it is, I think it is sheer obstinacy."

"Dear Mrs. Winthrop," said Lizzie's feeble voice, "I think you are mistaken; perhaps she is praying in her heart all the time."

"Perhaps so," was the reply, with a doubting emphasis. "But what a contrast she is to Cora Eaton! She is a most promising convert, and, after all our efforts, I can't say that of more than half a dozen. Now Marion is very popular in the school, and, she has such a 'taking' way with her, if she would seek religion many would follow her."

Now I heard the gentle tones of Miss Ingols. "I think if she should become converted she might bring many more into the fold of Christ. Though Marion has strong feeling, I am convinced she will never accept religion through fear, — something besides her emotions must be worked upon. She has a thinking mind, and that must be affected. Her intellect must question, her reason must be satisfied, before she can be won over."

"Yes, that is it," was the reply; "she must be reasoned with. I can talk with a dozen doctors better than I can with her, for she won't take a single statement for granted, but must have a profound reason for every word I utter. I am quite in despair about her."

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Ingols, "we have not taken the best course with her. We may have been a little too harsh. A little persuasion and argument might influence her."

"O, I presume," said Mrs. Winthrop, in a quick, sarcastic tone, "I presume my brother, the professor, has made a great mistake in this instance; and you have the rare penetration to discover it, and to analyze the incomprehensible character of this young lady! But, according to your theory, she may yet be saved, for Rev. Mr. Delano will preach next Sunday, and remain in the vicinity until after the great convention. He is young and talented, and people say he is very persuasive, and wins a great many into the church. His gentle hands may break the rock which resisted the fire and steel!"

Miss Ingols' voice was sweet and unruffled, as she said:

"It is very true that different minds must be influenced by different circumstances. I hope this Mr. Delano will prove as you describe him, and win Marion, as well as others, to Christ."

"O, I do hope so!" said Lizzie, eagerly. "May is a dear girl, and I long to have her enjoy salvation!"

Mrs. Winthrop said, quite graciously, "I am sure I hope so, too. Mr. Delano must be here as much as

possible, and he shall have a chance to influence her, for I am particularly anxious about Marion, as she will lead the rest."

Here I slipped softly from my seat, and left the room, agitated with various emotions. I was half angry, half amused; my pride was wounded; and yet I remembered that Lizzie had spoken of me affectionately, and Miss Ingols with respect.

"And so they think me a wicked unregenerate!" I said to myself. "But there is a faint hope in this Mr. Delano, — he, with his youth, and talents, and persuasive powers, may win me into the arms of the church — possibly! 'He shall have every opportunity to influence her.' O, yes, they will form an amiable conspiracy to convert me, because I am popular among my companions, and may lead them! Now, Marion, to be forewarned is to be twice armed. Keep your reason clear, and don't yield at the first alarm."

In spite of the great resistance I was to hold out against this new instrument for making proselytes, I had a girlish curiosity to see the young and talented Delano. As he arose in the pulpit, I fastened my eyes eagerly upon him. He was eminently handsome — his wavy hair was thrown up from his white brow; his brown eyes were lighted with a pleasant expression; his complexion was exceedingly delicate, and

his finely-cut lips parted, displaying two rows of pearls. His voice was both musical and powerful, and his address very graceful. He was, in person and manner, calculated to captivate the imaginative and susceptible.

Yet, when Arthur Willis rose to lead in prayer (he had, of late, sat in the pulpit and assisted in the exercise, thus preparing himself to enter upon the duties of the ministry), I thought his countenance expressive of a higher intellectuality, and his simple manner preferable to the studied grace of the other. But, after all, he was too pale, too grave, and sad-looking, to compare favorably with Mr. Delano.

The sermon was so unlike what I had ever heard in that desk before; it was so new, so beautiful in conception, that I was delighted. It was brilliant, poetic; with many bursts of real eloquence. His subject was "God seen in Nature," and he handled it in a masterly manner, scarce once touching upon those grim doctrinal points to which I was so averse. As he sat down in the hush succeeding his last lofty flight of eloquence, I felt that I was vanquished through my weakest points; my fancy and imagination were full-fed, my love for the beautiful and poetic well satisfied.

The afternoon discourse was very different. His style was tender and affecting, and his sermon a union of the doctrinal and practical.

But, in the evening, it seemed as though he had united all his forces to thrill his audience through and through; his oratory was the most singular and effective I had ever heard. His voice was capable of every intonation, and, with that powerful instrument, he swayed his hearers at his pleasure. His descriptions were the most terrific, his appeals the most direct and affecting. In language which I cannot paint he described the lost, the deplorable state of humanity. A visible shiver passed through many forms, as he pictured the all-wise, all-powerful Jehovah — the Perfect, the Just! — He whose supremacy was so awful, whose power was so infinite! And we, frail, trembling mortals, were alienated from his love, and subjects of his eternal displeasure. The same ideas, expressed in the harsh language and stentorian voice of Dr. Severe, had filled me with disgust; but now the language and manner were so different, that I was melted at once. The working of the speaker's face, his flashing eye and impassioned gestures, all attested that he was fearfully impressed with his awful theme.

And then, when all hearts were quaking with fear, he suddenly changed his deep and solemn tones to the most tender and touching accents. He spoke of Jesus, the kind, and merciful, and loving friend. He called him the blessed Prince of peace, the willing Saviour of all who would come to him. At the

right hand of the Father he was ever making intercession for the children of men; and ever with outstretched arms inviting the lost to rest in his bosom. He was ever pleading, ever striving with sinful man!

Then the preacher, with open arms and streaming eyes, besought the lost wretches before him to flee to that only refuge from the wrath of God; to accept the proffered mercy ere it were too late; to throw themselves into Jesus' arms, before death should shut the gate of hope and seal their despair.

The effect upon the audience was electrical. Loud sobs and suppressed shrieks attested to the high-wrought state of feeling. I rose involuntarily to my feet, with suffocation on my heart, and a burning, agonizing fear scorching my brain.

O, Marion! where now is thy clear reason, and questioning mind? All deluged in the surging waves of terror and alarm!

On the morrow, when the school assembled for prayers, Mr. Delano was present, and led in the service. He made a very interesting speech, which had the agreeable power of leaving both teachers and pupils in a high state of self-satisfaction. As, with hat in hand, he bowed his adieu, the professor invited him to attend the inquiry-meeting which was appointed for the evening; which invitation he promised to accept.

Here was a new inducement for everybody to be at the inquiry-meeting, for Mr. Delano enjoyed a most enviable popularity, especially among the girls. "He was the handsomest and smartest minister in the world. He was a perfect darling!" &c. &c. All were loud in their praises, but Cora, who looked even more sober than usual.

"Why don't you speak?" said the lively Helen. "Don't you think, Cora, he is a wonderful man? What a beautiful voice he has, and how affectingly he talked last night! Why, he made me shiver all over, and when they all burst out a-crying, I certainly thought I should go into fits! Isn't he very eloquent?"

I saw Cora's pale cheek turn still whiter, as Helen so characteristically described the effects of his eloquence. She smiled, however, as she said she thought Mr. Delano a very remarkable man; still, she believed she was afraid of him.

"Afraid of him! what a little mystery you are! But I must hurry up my lessons; for what if Mr. Delano should take it into his head to be present at some of the recitations?" Here the giddy girl commenced studying with great earnestness. This remarkable fit of industry lasted just ten minutes, and then Helen was flitting from one thing to another about the same as usual.

At the inquiry-meeting I was more like myself

than on the preceding evening. I regretted I had been so carried away by the excitement, and promised myself that I would retain a firmer hold upon my nerves and susceptibilities. Thus fortified, I was enabled to remain tolerably calm while in the midst of an unusually exciting meeting.

On Wednesday the French girls, Cora and myself, were invited by Mrs. Winthrop to spend the evening with her in her private parlor. Helen was delighted, and flew to the glass to reärrange her hair, meanwhile chattering as fast as possible. "Mrs. Winthrop used to invite her scholars into her room when ministers called there; but now it is a great while since she has done so. Mr. Delano will be there, of course, and Arthur Willis, I dare say. I hope so, at least, for I have n't spoken to a man or a boy, for over a month, Dr. Severe excepted."

The strict rules of the seminary, forbidding all conversation and communication between the sexes, were particularly obnoxious to Helen, who loved dearly to "chat with the beaux," as she expressed it. These rules had been rigidly enforced, until about the time of my entrance into the school. An eccentric patron of the institution had induced the doctor to annul the most rigid of these regulations, and, for a time, all the pupils met freely, at table, and in all the public apartments of the institute. But in the spring the old rules were put into active force again,

the doctor pronouncing the experiment he had tried a most dangerous one, as the freedom allowed produced too much mirth and hilarity among the scholars, and distracted their attention from religious subjects.

But I am digressing. At first I felt pleased at this unexpected compliment paid to my companions and myself; then the conversation I had overheard a few days before, recurred to my memory, and materially dampened my ardor. I gravely made a few additions to my toilet, while the others laughed and chatted in a flutter of anticipation. Resolving to be very reserved during the whole evening, I followed my friends into the parlor.

Both the doctor's and Mrs. Winthrop's reception of me assured me of their restored favor. Darling Cora felt it even before I did. I knew it by the sudden joyful flash of her blue eye. As we expected, Mr. Delano and Arthur Willis were present, also gentle Miss Ingols. After the ceremony of introduction, we seated ourselves in a row, and Dr. Severe and Mr. Delano resumed the thread of conversation which our entrance had broken.

At first I was inclined to listen to their discussion of some knotty theological point, but immediately thinking better of it, I directed my attention to Arthur. The young man was in a thoughtful mood, and I could scarcely elicit a word from him. In fact, we had a dull, prosy time for about half an hour,

when music was proposed, and I was requested to go to the piano. As I passed Miss Ingols, she whispered, "Select sacred music, my dear."

Therefore, in accordance with her wish, I chose a splendid anthem. After preluding a few notes, I declared my inability to perform it alone, and requested the rest to sing with me. Whereupon Mr. Delano and Miss Ingols came and looked over my shoulder. He sang the finest bass I had ever heard, and her rich, flexible voice took up the alto. Arthur found the place in another book, and Cora looked over with him, he singing a clear, sweet tenor, and she joining with me in the air. Altogether we formed a grand quartet, and continued singing for some time, charmed with our own melody.

We were all animated by the sweet influence of the music; I felt my reserve and coldness melt away before it, and we returned to our seats, quite a cheerful group.

The doctor now excused himself, and retired to his study. Mrs. Winthrop displayed a large pile of "compositions," and, with Miss Ingols to assist her, sat up to the table and engaged in the formidable task of "correction." Then Mr. Delano took upon himself the duty of entertaining the four maidens seated silently on the sofa. There was no resisting his persuasive, self-assurant manner, and, before we

were aware of it, we were all conversing in a familiar strain with the wonderful minister.

Several efforts were made to draw Arthur into our circle, but he was plunged, irrecoverably, into the depths of a profound revery.

Evidently Mr. Delano had been informed of the religious struggles in the minds of Cora and Sarah, for he spoke to them in a brotherly and affectionate manner. He called them young Christians; he fully understood their alternate hopes and fears, and sympathized with them in their painful struggles. He adjured them not to yield to the promptings of the adversary, but to be steadfast in the faith; and, when an opportunity offered, he advised them to be baptized and unite themselves with the church, that their feet might stand on a more sure foundation, and also that they might be an example to others.

Then he adroitly turned the conversation to Helen and myself. He inquired what books we had read, and which ones we liked best. We talked about our various studies; about our several homes and their local circumstances. When he learned that I was interested in Natural Philosophy, he launched into a pleasing description of certain experiments he had seen performed, and gave us some new and useful information on the subject. Helen had a taste for botany, which he soon discovered, and delighted her

by promising to show her a splendid book of engravings of a great many plants and flowers.

Thus pleasantly the time passed until nine o'clock, and we retired, feeling that we had enjoyed a very agreeable evening.

"Mr. Delano is a very entertaining man, and, though he is a minister and very religious, he has too much good taste to talk about his piety all the time; and is too much a gentleman to obtrude his peculiar sentiments upon everybody. I like him for that. I wish all pious people were as sensible." These were my last drowsy reflections as the dream-god shook his many-colored pinions above my pillow.

CHAPTER VII.

SORROW. — RENEWED STRUGGLES.

"The heart is made too sensitive
Life's daily pain to bear ;
It beats in music, but it beats
Beneath a deep despair."

A MESSENGER comes for Cora. Her mother is sick, dying, and if she would behold her face ere death has forever set his seal upon it, she must hasten to her bedside! I hold the dear girl in my arms, and kiss away her tears; but they keep coming thicker and faster, and she will not be comforted.

Then I fold her dresses and pack up her books, making every arrangement for her, for the poor stricken girl is powerless!

One more embrace — one more pressure of her hot lips to mine, and she is gone! I am alone, for the sister of my love is absent. I am in grief, for now has sorrow touched the heart of him, my best-loved one!

I seize a pen, and fast the fair page is covered with

words. I cannot stay. Dear Alfred! his heart is in shadow! I need not be chary of my tenderness now, I do not now fear to pour out my whole soul to him, for he needs it all to soften the sharpness of this coming woe.

My tears are flowing fast, as I write fond words of encouragement, of hope, and consolation; then, all moist with my tribute of sympathy, and glowing with the fervor of my affection, the little missive is sealed and sent on its healing errand!

The three weeks that followed! An age seemed compassed in them! Darkness, and fear, and doubt; torturous anguish by day, and blasting visions by night, are my confused remembrances of them!

I cannot describe how the firm ground of hope and safety slipped from beneath my feet. I cannot tell how I seemed to lose my identity, and all my former instructions were forgotten, and my former pleasing hope and shining faith were wrested from my grasp. I only know that I became mentally isolated, as it were, from all things else, and seemed drifting alone on a dark and stormy sea, without a compass to guide, or a haven in view!

I thanked God Cora was not there to witness my struggles. Her quick eye would have divined my mental torture, and her loving heart would have throbbed in pity for me. I could not have borne

that, in such a state of mind. I desired no sympathy, I shrank from exposing my inward strife to another mind. Those about me thought me cold and indifferent, when my soul was buried in itself, yet quivering and burning with intensity of life.

Mr. Delano was almost constantly with the scholars. He soon obtained a most unbounded influence over many of them. He could reprove, exhort, and advise, without giving offence, as easily as he could praise and commend. And he was so kind and thoughtful, and could do and say things as no one else could! He paid the most delicate attentions to Lizzie Williams. He often led her into the school-room, and when a few were gathered into Mrs. Winthrop's parlor, he would seat her in the easiest chair, and place a footstool at her feet, as gently as a woman. When she was more unwell than usual, he often sat with her in her own room, and talked upon religion, the theme she always chose.

And I, too, was often with them. A spell, a fascination, drew me to them, though I then thought it was Lizzie's repeated invitations, and Mr. Delano's pleasant welcome. They talked upon religion, and I listened; — 't was so at first. Mr. Delano never spoke directly to me at such times, and I might have remained a mere listener had I been less inquiring, less frank. But I broke the barrier by an abrupt

question. I fancied I saw a flaw in his argument, which I pointed out, and begged his explanation.

There was a flash in his eye, and a half-exultant smile upon his lip, as he turned to answer me. "Marion," he said, "your question gives me great pleasure; it shows you have thought upon the subject, and only need a little guidance to put you in the right way." He then went on to give a labored explanation, with many metaphors and winding arguments. I had but a vague understanding of it when he concluded, and could hardly tell what the original point was which I had wished explained; still, his manner was so confident, I had not a doubt but his explanation was perfect, and expressed myself satisfied. Again and again were similar scenes enacted, for my restless mind would question, and Mr. Delano was always ready to talk with me.

I was young in years, and still younger in experience. I was unskilled in argument, and unlearned in theology, for that which my father had taught me was simple love and good-will; but this was so different, so complicated, so awful, so mysterious! I was bound to understand it; but, alas, I could not! I tried not to believe it, but an unbidden power forced it upon my conviction.

At this stage of my experience, the spring term closed. Then was holden the great convention. A rush of people, a host of ministers, preaching, exhort-

ing, and praying, crying, groans of despair, and shouts of glory, all mingle confusedly in my memories of that time. On the first day of the meeting, twelve of the scholars, including Sarah French and Edwin Sanders, the once lively, religion-despising boy, with several others, were baptized and taken into the church.

To my surprise, Cora returned the day before the close of the convention. Then I learned that the professor had written, requesting her to come at that time. The lovely orphan was paler and sadder than ever, and not, as I had expected, overwhelmed with her grief, but unnaturally calm and still.

That evening Mr. Delano tapped at our door; Sarah hastened to admit him. He looked upon us affectionately. "Marion, Cora, Helen," he said, "I am charged with a most important mission. To-morrow a great number of people are to be baptized and united with the church. Dear girls, I trust you will not let this opportunity pass unimproved; give me your names, and let me add them to the happy number who will profess themselves the followers of Christ. I know I need not tell you of the vast importance of the step I desire you to take; it is essential, — necessary to your salvation, for, though it may be possible to be a Christian and not of the church, it is a dangerous ground for one to take. In the bosom of the church you will be measurably guarded

and defended from evil. For you security and safety can only be found in the company of the followers of the Lord. I have striven with you all, others have lent a helping hand, and, now that your minds are prepared and your hearts softened, I pray you to take the sacred vows upon you — publicly acknowledge your acceptance of Christ."

Helen began to weep, and covered her face with her hands.

Cora said, in a gentle voice, "I will join them; you may take my name." I was surprised at her unmoved expression and quiet manner. Mr. Delano smiled upon her; he knew it would be so; he was sure she would not hesitate.

"And you, Marion, you, of course, wish to make a public confession and acknowledgment of your faith?"

"O, sir," I cried, trembling, "I do wish it, I do desire to, and yet I hesitate! My parents bow at a different altar; they would be grieved, justly angry with me, should I take such a step without their advice or consent. I reproach myself for concealing my experience from them; let me write to them, and then, perhaps, I may be permitted to — "

"Marion, consider! This is not a common question of filial duty, but the issue is life or death! Eternal life or eternal death! Marion, consider! The Holy Spirit has striven with your natural

depravity; you are now awakened to a sense of your danger; you believe Christ is your only refuge from the doom which a just and offended God has pronounced upon the sinful world; you are not in the dark now, Marion; you cannot plead ignorance; your heart has been partially illuminated with divine light, — and yet you hesitate! O, my God, what may be the consequences of this backwardness! You will fall back into your old state of coldness and indifference; and, O, how much worse were this last state than the first! Will the gate of mercy always be open? Can you at any time retrieve your lost estate? Do not be presumptuous, Marion!"

He held my hand with an iron grasp, and his eagle eye pierced my soul like a burning arrow.

"I do consider, I will not be presumptuous," I gasped; "but my dear, good father, how can I wrong him so! He will think me heedless of all his love and goodness. O, I'm bewildered, I know not what to do!"

"'T is a weak and wicked excuse! The pleasures of the world entice you; your obdurate heart is yet untouched by the refiner's fire."

"Not so, dear sir; Heaven be my witness that it is only the respect which I owe to my parents, only my fear of their grief and displeasure, which bids me shrink from this duty."

"Mark your own words — 'which bids me shrink

from this duty!' Then you feel it to be a duty, — a duty which involves an everlasting interest, — and still you shrink from it! Marion, this is weak, this is cowardly! Do you deem the displeasure of your parents of more moment than the displeasure of your God? There is a mighty responsibility devolving upon you now; but accept the proffered mercy through Christ, become his professed and devoted follower, and how possible, how probable it is, that you may be the instrument, in the hands of God, of their conversion — their salvation! How happy that would be, how glorious! And yet you hesitate, you shrink from publicly devoting yourself to Christ. Marion, you love your father and mother; you say they are good; I implore you, for their sakes as well as for your own, not to neglect this blessed opportunity. Now is the time to accept Jesus, and then a blessed calm will steal over your soul. But refuse him now, and it may be too late, forever too late!"

His language filled me with terror. O, was the immortal destiny of three human souls dependent upon the decision of one weak, simple maiden! So he argued,— so I feared. I wrung my hands, weeping wildly.

He looked upon me with a softened expression, and said, compassionately, "Poor child, you are bewildered; you cannot judge for yourself; trust in me; let me decide for you. Shall I not report your name

with the others, who are to be baptized to-morrow?"

Gasping and sobbing, I murmured, "I can't promise you now, but to-morrow morning I will give you my answer. O, please, do leave me alone, for, indeed, I can't bear any more!"

I managed to restrain myself until he left the room, with a sorrowful, disappointed expression upon his handsome face. Then I threw myself upon the bed, and rolled over and over, yielding, in passionate cries and tears, to the tempest which raged through my whole being. Heaven and hell, eternity itself, seemed resting on my naked soul. O, what a responsibility! I, a frail, ignorant child, must decide the awful question. Great God, why didst thou delegate to thy creatures such dreadful power? Better be a beast — a soulless rock — than to run such a fearful risk!

The tempest spent itself. I sat up, and looked around upon my companions.

Cora sat motionless, with her small hands folded in her lap. Like a beautiful statue she looked, with her patient, mournful face. Her spirit was indrawn, for she appeared unconscious of anything about her. Helen's face was still hidden in her hands, and Sarah stood by my side, with a frightened look. "You are better," she said, with a sigh of relief. "Dear Marion, dear Helen, only give yourselves up

to Christ, and you will be happy. Do, both of you, consent to Mr. Delano's wishes."

"Helen," I cried, sharply, "will you be baptized? will you join the church?"

She lifted up her tear-wet face, "No, Marion, I cannot! O, perhaps I am tampering with my last hope of heaven, but I cannot give up all the pleasures of this life! I am only just sixteen, and the world is so bright and beautiful to me! I love to dance and play; I must laugh when my heart is full of glee, — no, I could not always be so grave and melancholy as religious people are. But my father and mother wish to have me baptized; they are frightened because I don't get religion; but I can't help it. I'm so young, now, — there's plenty of time, — by-and-by I will repent and get religion."

Sarah looked perplexed, then brightened at a new thought; "I heard Mrs. Winthrop say she was going round to talk with all the scholars to-night; she will be here soon, and perhaps she can influence you."

"O, dear!" I cried, bounding from the bed, "Mrs. Winthrop is my aversion! I will not stay here a minute longer. I will go to Miss Ingols; she is the only one I am not afraid of."

Suiting the action to the word, I hastened through the hall to Miss Ingols' room. My rap was answered by a gentle "Come in." She was seated in the middle of the room, unoccupied, and in a deeply

thoughtful attitude. I drew a footstool to her side, and sat upon it, leaning my head on her lap. Her small soft hand toyed with the stray locks on my temples. Then all my fear and anguish tided back upon my heart, and I wept and sobbed almost as wildly as before. She let me cry without saying a word until I became calm; then she spoke in her usual even tones.

"I understand the cause of your emotion. Your mind has arrived at a crisis; this is the decisive hour of your life. I believe your heart, your judgment, will lead you aright."

I looked up into her face. "Then you wish me to be baptized, and to join the church?"

"Certainly, my dear; I wish every one would be baptized, and feel especially desirous for you, whom I both love and esteem."

"Do you think baptism a saving ordinance?"

"Yes — and yet — perhaps not always; at least, it is very important. Those who have received baptism have stronger motives for living a Christian life, and, believe me, the church is a great safeguard."

"But my parents think differently; at least, they are opposed to this church; they say they have wider and more liberal views of God and his government."

"In any other instance I should advise you to honor the opinion of your parents; but, Marion, this

has to do with your own soul. Let no earthly consideration come before its eternal interest. This talk about wider and more liberal conceptions of God's government is very dangerous. It leads men to scepticism, and makes mockers of religion."

"Miss Ingols, I want to ask a question. I believe you are truly pious, but you are always grave and sad. Is it religion which makes you so? Must I, too, become melancholy, never smiling, never expressing any emotions?"

"God forbid that the possession of religion should affect you as it has me! No, my dear, you may be cheerful, you can be happy, though all worldly pleasures and amusements are forbidden."

"But, pardon me, Miss Ingols, why does not your religion give you joy? Mrs. Winthrop, and Lizzie Williams, and all other professors that I know, are continually telling how happy their religion makes them."

"O, because they believe it, while I feel it. It sinks into my heart, — deep into my heart, — the fearful depravity of man, and his awful responsibility. I see, around me, hundreds hurrying to destruction, and I am powerless to save them. O, that sight blasts my vision!" She covered her pallid face with her trembling hands. I was deeply affected at this burst of feeling from her who ever maintained such a nun-like repose of manner.

"You wonder at my emotion. O, Marion, my outward calm but hides the volcanic fires within!" She pressed her hand passionately upon her heart. "Here is a living crater, and the burning lava never ceases to fall upon my heart. Not often is the outward crust of coldness broken, but my love and anxiety for you have overthrown my self-control. Perhaps my sad experience may benefit you; perhaps it may decide you at this great crisis. In confidence will I give you the secret which has blighted my life."

"And in confidence will I receive it."

She drew me to her, pressed her lips upon my forehead, and, with averted face, told her sad tale.

"I was a thoughtless, happy maiden,—one of the happiest in all the world. I was as sensitive and confiding as your friend Cora,—as merry and joyous as Helen. At eighteen, a beautiful dream of love was unfolded to my heart, and then I was ten times happier than before. My Roland was so handsome, so manly, so brave! He was the very soul of generosity, and scorned a mean action. O, I loved him with my whole heart! He was my father's clerk, and resided in our family. Day by day he seemed nearer and dearer, and his love for me was manifested in his every word and look.

"There was a revival in our village. The people were awakened from their indifference, and many

found comfort in Jesus. I had scarcely had a serious thought in all my life, but I was deeply impressed now, and became one of the first converts. My faith has never wavered since then. God knows I have never regretted that hour — but — O, others —"

She caught her breath with a gasping sob, and was silent. I felt her arm about me tremble violently. "Dear Miss Ingols, if it gives you such pain, do not tell me."

"No, no," she said quickly. "It cannot give me more pain than I now feel. I need sympathy; my soul longs to pour out a portion of its woe into another's breast; and, besides, Marion, you need the lesson. Well, Roland was not religious; he did n't like the revival. He was a great mimic, and he imitated to perfection all the oddities and peculiarities of the ministers. When I became converted he was more tender of my feelings, but I could see that he felt just as before. I felt deeply anxious for his salvation, and one day I tried to reason with him. But he laughed at me, and was so funny and merry that I laughed too. He sprang upon his horse, which stood saddled at the door, and, while pony was taking his preliminary steps, said, — the words are burned into my memory, — 'I tell you, Harriet, religion is all a farce. Let those who like it play it; I have no faith in it;' and with a light laugh he rode away.

"Sick at heart, I turned to enter the house.

Right by my side stood our minister; he had heard Roland's last words. He looked at me sharply, and said, 'Girl, your heart is entangled with that young man's; you must draw him up to your standard, or he will draw you down with him to perdition!'

"I burst into tears, and hid myself in my chamber. There I made a vow that when he returned, I would talk with him, and never leave him until I had touched his heart. But, alas! alas! I never saw him in life again! In less than half an hour his bleeding, mangled corpse was brought into the house. And, O, worse than the bitterness of death, he was launched into eternity! An awful gulf stretched 'twixt him and me! His last thoughtless words danced, like so many demons, before my reeling senses! — O, heavens! — Roland! Roland!"

She leaned heavily upon me, and from her laboring bosom came up such agonized moans as curdled my blood with horror.

After a long pause, she spoke again. "The ministers all said there was 'no hope, — no hope for such as he; his portion was with the scoffers of God.' I believed it then, — I believe it now. For weeks I was raving. O, that my reason had never been restored! — that I might forget! But I cannot forget! Ever in my ears is sounding 'No hope!' and ever is my heart calling for Roland! I have lived within myself, wearing an outward garb of cold-

ness. And what are all the events of this life to me, now? I am dead to all the passions and emotions common to us all, for this one living, deathless woe fills my being."

I almost shrieked in painful sympathy.

"Marion," she said again, in a broken voice, "my lesson is this: seek your own salvation; then labor for your friends, for all you love, and bring them to the feet of Jesus. Do this, if you wish for a moment's peace, here or hereafter. If I had kept Roland by my side, if I had pleaded a little more earnestly with him, he might have been saved! But now, unavailing, undying regret is only mine!"

She leaned back in her chair, weak and powerless with exhaustion. At that moment, as though my high-wrought feelings must be strained to the greatest tension, Lizzie Williams entered from her bed-chamber. Her emaciated form was wrapped in a long night-robe; her thick, black hair hung loosely upon her shoulders, and the lamp in her hand sent a deathly glare upon her wan face. She came directly to me, and twined her arm about my neck. "Dear May," she said in the hollow tones of the consumptive, "dear May, I know why you are here. The adversary is striving for a final victory over you. Rise up and be strong; give your heart to Jesus, and all will be well with you. O, Marion, I have only a little while to stay on earth, and my last request,

my dying wish, is that you should receive the baptism to-morrow. Promise me you will, I implore."

It was as though a voice had called upon me from the grave. The fire in my veins seemed suddenly turned to ice.

"Look up, dear friend, and say that you will!"

My soul gave a great cry. O, I would do anything, everything, all things required of me!

"Yes, yes, yes, Lizzie I give you my word!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SCHOOL DUTIES AGAIN. — ALFRED'S OPINION.

Cora and I were baptized, and formally received into the church. Again did excitement burn on Cora's cheek, and her apathy was changed to wild enthusiasm. But I was like one walking in a trance. The fearful agitation of yesterday now reäcted powerfully; a numbness settled down upon my heart, and pervaded my soul. Like an automaton, I passively spoke and acted in obedience to every direction given me.

I said I was very happy; I imagined I was so, but it was a very questionable sort of happiness, which admitted both anxiety and fear. I was safe now, of course, but my friends were in danger! A great, proud resolve grew up in my heart — I would convert them! Yes, to me was delegated the priceless privilege of leading those dear ones to the true altar. I dreamed not of presumption, for were not the foolish things of this world to confound the wise?

Poor Lizzie Williams grew rapidly worse. No

longer could her most blinded friends doubt that death had woven his meshes round the citadel of her life. Her guardian came to take her away; he looked inexpressibly shocked when he beheld the fearful ravages made by disease upon the once blooming girl, and gently chided her for concealing her real state from him.

Her parting with her schoolmates was painful in the extreme. Dissolved in tears, she flung her arms about me. "O, Marion," she cried, "I shall never see you again!"

"In heaven," I whispered, "we shall meet again! You are not afraid of death, Lizzie?"

"No, not for myself, but there are others. I have a dear, good brother; but, alas, he is unconverted! and I have remained here unconcernedly, when every power of my being should have been exerted in his behalf. O, bitterly do I regret this error, for now he may never find the way to Jesus! Marion, do you take a lesson from my painful contrition for this neglect. You have dear parents and a lover. O, may these friends, dearer to you than all others, be saved through your instrumentality! Promise me, Marion, that you will never cease to importune them until they accept the proffered salvation. So, when death shall take you by the hand, and bid you turn your eyes away from earth, may you not feel this regret which stings me now!"

She turned from me to say farewell to her mates clustering round her, and then, almost fainting from weakness, she was borne to the carriage. I never saw her again. In a few days came the tidings that the silver cord was loosed — Lizzie was at rest! I believed that her spirit was welcomed to heaven, and this thought mingled sweet consolation with my falling tears.

One day Cora and I were told that a friend had called to see us. We were both sure it was Alfred; and, eager to welcome him, we hastened to the reception-room. He arose quickly as we entered, and, opening his arms, drew us both to his heart. I met him with a joyful face; but when Cora sobbed upon his breast, I recollected the death-stroke which had robbed him of a mother since we had last parted. There was a mournful shadow on his face, but it passed quickly, and a look of hope and trust came instead. He spoke to her such sweet and cheerful words that she was soon calm, and wiped away her tears.

Then we sat upon the sofa, he encircling us both with his arms. His dear presence seemed to animate us both with unwonted joy. Cora was more like herself than I had seen her for many a day, and April smiles and tears sparkled over her face. Alfred looked from her to me with love-lit eyes. "Here is my whole world!" he cried,—"the whole world which

my heart embraces; and yet I must not forget the struggling world without; for ye, dearest ones, will I pray first, then for my brother man."

I forgot everything in my joy at his presence, and for a time our communion was like that of angels. But a word broke the delightful spell.

"I hear there has been a revival in your school. Have your hearts been shaken, and your nerves unstrung, by the commotion?"

There was a constrained pause.

At length Cora said, in a low voice, "Dear brother, what should you say had it shaken the fetters from our souls, and made us free; and the scales from our eyes, and given us sight?"

He turned his half-bewildered, questioning gaze from her to me. "Yes, Alfred," I said, "this revival has brought grace to our souls. We both of us feel that we have 'new hearts,' born of the Holy Ghost."

"Marion, Cora, do you mean that you have been turned by fanatical excitement? Am I to understand that you have bartered away the faith of your fathers, for a heartless, selfish creed?"

Wounded by his words, I drew back coldly. "Your harsh adjectives are very unnecessary. You are to understand that Cora and I have renounced the wicked pleasures of the world, and joined the church to which this school is connected."

The muscles of his face contracted, as though his heart had received a sudden thrust. Putting us both from him quickly, he walked back and forth, as was his custom when laboring under any excitement.

I was so unprepared for such a show of feeling, that I became confused and silent.

"What were you thinking of? — without informing me, or even consulting your parents! What infatuation! O, I was not prepared for this! I had more confidence in your strength of mind. I thought that the religion of love and beauty was well grounded in your hearts. Girls, girls! I fear you have made shipwreck of your happiness!"

"Alfred, dear brother! don't be angry with us! I know, if you consider upon it, you will not blame us, and perhaps, in time, you will join us; then we shall be so happy!"

"Happy!" He stopped short. "If I should ask you, you would say you were never so happy before, when your altered looks deny it. O, blind boy that I have been! I thought, Cora, that the extremes of your passionate emotion and despairing calmness were the effects of natural grief; now I see that the worm of doubt had sapped the life of your heart."

His lip quivered, and tears stood out upon his lashes.

I laid my hand upon his arm. "Dear Alfred, I am sorry you have not known this before; we have

done wrong in excluding our best friends from our confidence. But I do not regret — I pray I may never regret — the events which have shown me the danger threatening my everlasting peace. Alfred, our faiths differ; shall that sever our affection?"

His affectionate nature could not resist the appeal. "No, dearest May, Heaven forbid! Nothing shall divide our hearts!"

He took me by the hand, and we sat upon the sofa again, as before. "I do not, I will not, blame you, dear girls. Now I think of it calmly, I cannot wonder at it. Two such loving and confiding hearts — it is not strange that your reason was overpowered. And so you have been borne away in the fierce current of fanaticism, and stranded your faith on the dark shore of partialism!"

"Alfred, you talk very strangely!"

"Do I, dear sister? I feel all that I say, and more. I am older than you, and understand, better than you, the wiles and persuasions of the so-called ambassadors of Christ. In college I am in the midst of a fierce revival, yet I hold fast to my beautiful faith. I am not ashamed of it, and I would not deny it for honor or friends! I am an especial object of attack; scoffs, and jeers, and cruel taunts, are levelled at me; I am branded as a heretic, because, forsooth, I say that God is a loving Father, and unchangeable, and that Christ died to save all. But I am the

stronger for opposition! Then I am flattered; my love of approbation is appealed to; my high place in my class, my attainments, are all arrayed insinuatingly before me; but I scorn to be driven from my stronghold by so weak an instrument! Never, God helping me, will I deny my honest convictions; and may I not be left to a faith so dishonoring to Him!"

I tried to bring my agitated mind to a point, that I might speak to him with effect. I wished to warn him against the fatal error under which he labored. I would have assumed the office of mentor, and talked to him as others had talked to me. But I could not form a single reproving sentence. There was such a manly earnestness in his manner, such decision in his tone, that I shrank from confronting his position. So I remained silent, thinking that, when time had softened his prejudices, I would attempt to win him over. Love might prevail where opposition and flattery had failed.

There was an awkward silence, during which Alfred looked down with a shaded brow. Suddenly he raised his head, his old, familiar smile breaking like light over his countenance.

"I thank God this step is not irrevocable! When you are removed from this chilling atmosphere, you will soon turn to the true altar of love and hope."

"Do not flatter yourself that I shall renounce my faith so easily. I was not quickly won, nor shall I

be quickly turned from my present ground of hope."

"Well, Marion, we will not quarrel about it now, for I see that superstition clouds your mind. I hope, I pray, it may all be dissipated in time. I desire one thing of you, May; you must immediately inform your father of the change in your belief."

I readily promised, for conscience admonished me to do so.

Now he rose to go, and seemed for the first time to observe Cora's paleness and languor. "Why, Cora!" he exclaimed, "how thin and pale you have grown! and you have a cough,— that is bad."

It was nothing but a cold, Cora said, not worth minding.

But Alfred looked troubled. "It is worth minding, I fear. You must have some balsam. I will buy a bottle and send you, and Marion must see that you take it."

I promised, if Cora was inclined to be neglectful, I would exert my authority; she should certainly take the balsam.

Cora smiled, saying she should be a very unresisting victim to my authority, for she did not object to the balsam. Then Alfred embraced us both fondly, and bade us adieu with a cheerfulness which my instincts told me was forced and unnatural.

I wrote to my father, and the answer which I

received brought tears of mingled contrition and grief. Thus it ran:

"My only, my precious child, what words can I use to tell you of the wound inflicted by your letter! The contents came like a sharp and stinging rebuke to my soul. O, bitterly do I reproach myself for placing you within the pale of such an improper influence! and your mother is weeping, and deploring her own want of forethought and discretion.

"My Marion, do you forget the hours of religious enjoyment which we have passed together,—our readings, our communings with a loving Father, through nature? Have I not taught you that mercy and justice are equally blended in the divine character, and that His spirit is love? And now you reject all those holy lessons, and, instead of the gospel, which is 'good news,' you take to your heart a dark and cruel creed! Mercy is lost in stern justice, and the Father forgotten in the offended God. Your only hope is in Jesus; and even he, who died for all, will be defrauded of his own, through the wiles of the devil. Are you better, are you happier, for such a faith? Does the word of God appear more luminous to your understanding? or, rather, are you not plunged in gloom, and does not the Bible seem a tangled web of mystery?

"O, Marion, if I had thought it would ever have been thus with you; were you dead I could not have

mourned so bitterly! But the Lord will answer my ceaseless prayer; you will again rejoice in his unclouded love! I do not reproach you, my child; I will never blame you for what has passed; the sin lies at my own door, and now I feel that the punishment is more than I can bear.

"I will come for you immediately, and in the pure atmosphere of home may you be restored to your right mind. "Your ever fond Father."

I showed this letter to my confidant, Miss Ingols, who was filled with apprehension. If my father removed me from school so soon, I might be led astray; I might even fall from grace.

Trembling at the thought of so dire an event, I asked her advice. She placidly studied the letter. "I think your father is a good man, and feel that his expressions of sorrow are sincere; yet he is cherishing a fatal error. Marion, it must be your task to disabuse his mind of the darkness which he fancies hangs over yours."

"I hope I may be allowed to do so; yet it must be done more by actions than words; for he is my father, and I respect as well as love him."

"That makes me think you had a visit from your friend, Alfred Eaton, the other day. Did you tell him how you and Cora had found a new hope?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"At first he was half angry, and then he talked much in the same strain that father does in his letter."

"And you were true to yourself, Marion? You told him of the fallacy of his hopes, and of the superiority of the religion you profess? You warned him with earnest and loving words?"

I turned my crimsoning face away, and remained silent.

"Marion, did you have any influence with him, or was he very obstinate?"

"I was very wrong, Miss Ingols, but, indeed, I could not bring my heart to talk to him as I ought. And his mother has just died; I was so full of pity and sympathy I could scarcely say anything."

She placed her hand upon my shoulder, and brought my face round close to hers. Her voice was husky, as she said, "My dear Marion, what if you should never see him again? What if he should die unrepentant, and you had never spoken a word which should give birth to even a thought of the true salvation? Did Lizzie Williams' last words fall unheeded on your ears? Has my own agonizing experience no influence on your mind?"

I hid my face in her bosom and burst into tears. "I am not blaming you, dear girl; I only wish to impress a true sense of your duty on your mind. You will grow stronger in the Lord, and then you

will not fear to urge salvation upon any whom you love. You are but a young Christian, just received into the kingdom, and I would guard you from danger. A few months longer in this place would be of incalculable benefit to you. Could you only stay through the fall term, as you have intended, I would let you go without a word, feeling that you were strong in the faith. You must beg your father to let you stay. You have united yourself with this church; tell him that his taking you away from here would not undo that act. Then urge upon him the necessity of remaining to complete the course of study you have commenced. I think he will yield to your persuasions."

I wrote as she directed, and, according to her prediction, my too indulgent father was overcome by my arguments and entreaties. He gave a reluctant consent for me to continue there through the fall term; and, of course, Cora was to remain with me.

CHAPTER IX.

MY GROWTH IN GRACE, SO CALLED.—ARTHUR WILLIS.

THUS were the chains riveted about my soul. Thus was a chilling theology indoctrinated more fully into my mind, which sent its grim shadows down to the innermost depths of my heart.

I strove to live consistently with my professions. All my girlish grace and lightness of manner was merged into an austere gravity. I walked and talked, and worked and studied, with methodical exactness. I attended every religious meeting, and regarded every religious observance with unwearying patience. I was by nature an enthusiast, and now that the energies of my mind were all bent to this one point, it was little wonder that I even went beyond my religious models.

Even Lizzie Williams, in the height of her popularity, had never been so delighted in by her teachers, nor so envied by her companions. Where I was once disliked and distrusted, I was now a special object of affection and admiration. Dr. Severe treated

me with marked kindness, and Mrs. Winthrop lavished upon me every term of praise and endearment. My exemplary conduct was often referred to, and many times have I been pointed out as a model scholar and Christian. Flattery's most poisoned draught was presented to my lips, and I drank. I became proud, — not of my beauty, nor dress, nor wealth, nor station, — not of my mind, nor its acquirements, — but of my religious preferment, my fancied spiritual improvement.

I came to think I was an object of God's special favor; to feel within myself that I was surely one of his elect. I regarded all other sects and denominations with a genuine aversion, and thought there was little hope of heaven out of the pale of my own church.

I look back upon the time of which I write, through a long vista of quiet years, and I can comprehend more clearly than then all my thoughts and emotions. It was a blind infatuation which possessed me. A fatal error clogged my spirit's pinions and bent them earthward, when I would fain have soared above.

Withal I was not happy; a continued unrest, an unsatisfied longing, pervaded my soul. Then I would think it was all my want of spiritual fervor, and I would pray and wrestle with myself until exhausted with mental agitation.

There were some backsliders among the converted

pupils, and it required great ingenuity and patience on the part of the teachers to reclaim them. It was once whispered about that Edwin Sanders had been the perpetrator of a practical joke upon the professor; but the story was soon hushed up, for Edwin was a member of the church. Yet nature was too strong to remain always hidden beneath the imposed restraint, and sometimes it displayed itself in wild freaks and dare-devil fooleries, greatly to the discredit of his professions. Still we had hopes for the wild boy, as he invariably manifested great contrition for his sins, and sometimes for a whole week would conduct with unquestionable propriety.

I began to hear Arthur Willis spoken of sneeringly, — the irreproachable Arthur Willis; what could it mean? I observed the doctor treated him coolly, and that the young man himself appeared more unhappy and perplexed than before. Could it be possible that the high hopes centred in him would be disappointed? So I feared; and yet his noble countenance belied every aspersion which could be breathed against him.

One evening Cora and I were with Miss Ingols, listening to her charming music, when Arthur Willis entered. He wished us good-evening, and expressed his satisfaction at finding us all together, as he might have no other chance to say good-by to us.

"Am I to understand," said Miss Ingols, leaving

the piano and placing a chair for him; "am I to understand that you think of leaving us?"

"Yes, Miss Ingols, I am going now, of my own free will. I prefer to walk out like a man, than to wait until I am driven, dogged out, hissed out; or, in more polite language, expelled!"

His tone was the concentration of bitterness, and his words surprising for one so gentle and refined.

"I am sorry you are going, and still more do I regret your apparent dissatisfaction."

"I am glad to go where I can breathe freely; and I will never enter a religious hot-house again!"

"I am in a perfect puzzle, Mr. Willis. Have you quarrelled with the professor? Do explain yourself!"

"Miss Marion, I have, unfortunately, a mind of my own, which must draw its own inferences,—a mind which cannot be bought, even for the sake of popularity or fortune. The coldness of former friends, and the withdrawal of their support, cannot make me see truth in an absurdity, nor harmonize contrarieties. I once thought the Bible a perfect guide, and had confidence in Dr. Severe as an expounder of the Word. I resolved to fit myself for a minister of the gospel, and commenced my tutelage under Dr. Severe. But my heart questioned what my creed asserted, and then my mind was thrown into perplexity and confusion. The more I studied, the

more I pondered, the greater was my difficulty. A great problem has been revolving in my mind for months, and I can only conclude that the premises are false. My first expressed doubt brought down upon my head a sharp rebuke; and, since then, as my convictions have become more and more unsettled, I am denounced as a come-outer, an infidel! Argument, entreaty, threats, alike have failed; it is reason I want, and that is not yet clear to my mind. In two months I should have completed my studies, and then I was to be ordained. But, of course, that could not take place in my present state of mind, and so I told the doctor. Goodness! what a storm I had raised! Before, the house was almost too hot to hold me, and now I am called an ingrate, a deceiver. I am accused of purposely unsettling the minds of those who have fallen back from the Christian ranks; if it had not been for me all who were converted might yet have been humble devotees. Verily, if an earthquake had swallowed us up, it would be a just penalty for the harboring of a heretic such as I am!"

He sat very upright during the delivery of this speech. His usually pale face was flushed, and an unwonted light flashed in his dark eye.

"Arthur Willis, you are beside yourself!"

"Make yourself easy, Marion; I am nearer in my right mind than I have been, and I shall be quite sane when I have left this place. If, indeed, there is

a God, — I almost doubt it sometimes, — it is strange he does not reveal himself more clearly to man, that there might be no disputing about his government."

Cora's eyes were dilated and swimming in tears. She laid her little hand on the young man's arm, and said, gently, "I pray you never to question, in thought, the existence of God; rather seek his face, and embrace his religion; then you will no more doubt."

His expression changed, and he said, in a softened voice, "What is this religion, Cora, which you would have me obtain? I cannot see it, I have never found it. Is it not, after all, a phantom of the imagination, rather than a reality?"

"O, believe me, it is a reality, a necessity! else how can you be saved?" She turned away from him; still I could see the bright drops fall through her fingers as she essayed to hide her agitated face.

Miss Ingols now spoke: "Your error has been in reasoning too much. There are mysteries in religion which we cannot always fathom, and it is best to leave speculation and argument alone. You will go away for a little while, and then, when your mind is rested, and has resumed its natural tone, you will come back again, and all we have hoped for in your behalf will be accomplished."

Arthur shook his head. "My dear lady, I shall never voluntarily return. My heart is weaned from

everything pertaining to a ministerial profession, and I assure you I shall never sue for the renewed friendship of those who tell me that a pure moral life will avail me nothing at the last day, if I have not professed that something which men call religion. If the highest morality is nothing in the sight of God, and religion can exist without morality, then, indeed, I would be an infidel rather than seek that religion!"

I was inexpressibly shocked, and yet I felt he had been used unkindly.

"I perceive I am grieving you all, and this talk is doing no good," he said, rising. "I will now bid you good-by; and if, when I am gone, you hear my name coupled with reproach, remember how long I battled with myself, and that at last I was driven away by unkindness and unmerited scorn."

He shook hands with us severally, while his fine face was contracted with the emotion he could not wholly subdue.

"May the Lord follow you and lead you aright!" said Miss Ingols. The young man bowed and turned away.

Soon Mrs. Winthrop appeared, with an air of triumphant satisfaction. "And so he has concluded to go at last; it will be a great relief to my mind."

"Do you mean Arthur Willis?" queried Miss Ingols.

"To be sure. I am heartily glad he has the sense to perceive that his presence here is a nuisance. He has done no little harm in privately teaching his infidel notions; and, even if he had never said a word, it could not but have a bad influence for one who intended to be a minister to take the stand that he has. His mind has been in a ferment these six months, and now he comes out a rank infidel. It is so discouraging, so mortifying!"

"It is a sad case," said Miss Ingols; "and yet I think the word infidel is too harsh to apply to him. And, begging your pardon, Mrs. Winthrop, I am sure you wrong him in accusing him of intentionally misleading others. He is one who cannot bear harshness, and he feels that he has been condemned unjustly. He goes away with bitter feelings, and I fear that the very measures which have been taken to convert him will, in the end, drive him to destruction."

"Have you concluded, madam? Have you arrayed all your charges? First, I am taken to task because I call this young man what he undoubtedly is, an infidel. Then you accuse me of making wrongful charges against him. And, to crown all, you insinuate that my brother, the professor, has ill-treated him, has been unnecessarily harsh towards him! This is too much! Why, if the doctor has been at fault at all, he has been too patient, too forbearing!

This is not the first time you have called our conduct or our motives in question, and it is very displeasing to me. You forget your place, Miss Ingols."

The indignant blood bounded to my brow. I turned to see how Miss Ingols bore this insulting harangue. Her countenance was unchanged, and her voice as clear and sweet as ever.

"You mistake me, Mrs. Winthrop; I call no one's name in question; I only expressed my opinion that the best method had not been taken. I cannot but regretfully feel that if a little more patience and indulgence had been used, Arthur Willis might have remained with us, and been eventually saved from the danger now threatening him. O, if his noble soul is forever lost, what responsibility lieth here!"

A sudden paleness overspread her face, and she rose up quickly, and passed into her bed-chamber. I understood the motion, and knew the anguish of her crushed heart had swelled in renewed power, and that for hours the black waves of woe would roll over her soul, without one struggling ray of hope to pierce the gloom.

"Well, Harriet Ingols is the strangest girl! I never could make her understand her place. But — why — Cora, Marion, how came you here listening to the conversation of your superiors? You are guilty of a great impropriety. Go to your rooms, I say, and study better manners!"

CHAPTER X.

AGAIN AT HOME.

THE fall term had closed, and we commenced making arrangements to return to our homes. I was glad, for Cora's sake, that our school duties were over, as I felt that she was failing. The balsam, which Alfred purchased for her cough, had not proved very efficacious, and I saw, with alarm, that her appetite and strength were fast forsaking her. But I argued that a change of scene might benefit her, and hoped much from the nursing of a good aunt of hers, whom Alfred had persuaded to live with them.

My father came for us. There was nothing in his fond greeting reminding me of the change which had taken place in me since we had parted; nothing which betokened grief or displeasure on his part. He was very kind and attentive, and solicitous for our comfort in the smallest matters. On the journey he pointed out every object of note or interest, and talked about them in his usual instructive and entertaining manner. And yet, in the pauses of conver-

sation, I was conscious that he studied my face with painful anxiety.

I was grateful for his forbearance, and thought I could only repay him with great delicacy and consideration. "And," said I, inwardly, "when he is convinced that, after all, I am right and he is wrong, we will love each other more than ever, and I shall be so happy!"

Animated with these hopes, the time passed quickly to me. Before nightfall I was in my own home, with my mother's welcoming voice in my ear, and her tears and kisses on my cheek.

A year is a long time to be from home. A year? it seemed like three! Now again in the dear, familiar place, my breast was overcharged with happy emotion.

"I had not grown a bit, or altered in the least!" so declared my mother in her first salutation. But when my bonnet and wrappings were removed, she thought I had grown older, and lost some of my bloom.

"Don't tell a girl of eighteen about losing her bloom," said my father, laughing; "she must wear roses many a year yet."

"O, I hope so! She is tired now, and has studied too hard, I dare say. You must do nothing but rest yourself for a month, my love, and hunt up all your favorite books and employments. See,

May, I have brought your little work-table and rocker into the parlor, so everything might seem natural to you."

So I sat in my old familiar chair, with my dear father and mother on either side. The incense of affection was so delightful, and such pleasant memories came thronging in upon my heart, that every fear and anxiety was forgotten. There was nothing to mar our first interview, and not a sad thought intruded, save when I remembered that darling Cora had no parents to welcome her.

A day or two after, Cora visited us, and as she went away, my mother stood at the window watching her thoughtfully. She turned, with a gentle sigh, and seated herself by my side.

"Poor Cora!" she said, "how she is changed! She used to spring through the garden like a bird, and her face was like a gleam of sunshine! Now her step is slow and languid, and she is so still, and pale, and sad, it makes my heart ache to look at her."

"No wonder, mother; her home is desolate. Alfred is away, and she must be lonely only with her aunt."

"Yes, poor child, she feels her bereavement sadly. But that alone could not destroy every trace of her joyous nature."

"Cora is unwell and low-spirited."

"I see that plainly enough, the dear, motherless girl! I think she is consumptive. Yet, surely, Marion, there is something more than common sorrow and illness affecting her spirits. She is changed every way; I can hardly realize that she is the same Cora Eaton who, one year ago, was the merriest, wildest gypsy in town. And her laugh, May, you used to say, was like the sweet gush of a bird's song. Ah, she seems like a blighted flower! And you, my dear, are altered, too. When you were gone the house seemed too still; I used to long to hear your loud, hearty laugh, and to see you dancing and humming about your work; but you are still and grave. I fear, Marion, you are not as glad as you ought to be, to come home again."

"Dear mother, don't say that; I am glad to be at home, and you and father never seemed dearer to me; but—" Here tears choked my utterance, so touched was I by my mother's tender reproaches.

"There, I've made you cry already, and I promised your father I would never say a word to grieve you, or which should sound like the shadow of a reproach. Forgive me, May," she said, wiping away my tears, while her own came faster. "I do not mean to find fault with you. I only am to blame if the sunshine of your faith is turned to coldness and gloom. O, if I had listened to your

good father's advice, this sorrow might have been averted!"

"Mother, mother, don't cry; it breaks my heart!"

"There, I will be calm for your sake, darling; but, O, it is sad to have the one star of our dwelling dimmed and shaded — to have our only child become the victim of an iron theology! for what else can I call it, when I witness the transformation of two such children of nature and joy? But I am the most to blame, and that makes my grief the more bitter!"

"Do not blame yourself, dear mother, for what I bless you!"

"You bless me for it? My child, you know not what you say! But you never shall have anything to cross or disturb you. Your father says that, if you are not opposed, your mind may, in time, outgrow these errors and prejudices."

"Dear mother, hear me; I am not unhappy,— at least, I shall not be when you and father have accepted the true salvation. If I am changed in appearance, 't is because I now see the responsibilities, the stern realities of life, where I once only beheld the sunny side. I hope and pray I may be the instrument, in the hands of God, of the conversion and ultimate salvation of those I love. When you think as I do, you will rejoice in the events which you now lament."

"My child, think not you can turn your parents from their altar of faith. I am indeed unworthy to be called a Christian, but your father is one in the truest sense. For many years he has taken Christ for his guide, and prayerfully, earnestly, has he tried to walk in his steps. I have been a worldly woman, and yet I have long felt the need of genuine religion. Now will I seek it more earnestly than ever, not that I may be saved from endless woe, but that I may rejoice, as the children of God rejoice! The religion of which I speak will make life brighter and heaven nearer. It is fittest for the young, as well as for the old; for the gay, as for the sad. It dries the mourner's tears, and illumines every shadow of life. That you, my precious child, may enjoy this religion, is the ceaseless prayer of my heart!"

She arose with a dignity which awed me, while her face, still wet with tears, was eloquent with high hope and trust.

She left me to my reflections, and sad and confusing they were. Conscience whispered severe reproaches. Instead of warning her of her danger, instead of weeping and praying with her, and telling her of my agonizing fears, and yearning hopes, I had allowed myself to be overcome by her regrets. I had not even defended my position with Christian zeal. Ah! with deep reverence and affection on the

one side, and threatened desolation and separation on the other, I was painfully bewildered. "But another time I will be firmer;" and so I put aside the imaginary duty, which, though unpleasant, I deemed unavoidable.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MINISTER AND HIS WIFE. — SUNDAY.

"Well, Marion, how do you like our minister?"

"I cannot say that I like him very much."

"I suppose my daughter can give her reasons for not being pleased with one who is universally admired and beloved?"

"Why, he is — I can't exactly say he is gay and trifling — and he is sufficiently dignified — but he is so — has such a brisk, cheerful way, that I can't like in a minister."

"How would you have him appear? I suppose you think ministers ought to look sad and solemn, always talking and acting as though they were at somebody's funeral."

"No, father, not so bad as that; still, it seems, if a minister feels the responsibilities of his office very sensibly, and realizes the sinfulness of man, that he will always be grave and serious."

"Grayity and seriousness certainly become the

sacred office; but Mr. Whitney is a very social man, and in friendly intercourse is always cheerful, and sometimes witty and merry. This I consider perfectly consistent, as the faith he proclaims is a bright and glorious one. The gospel he preaches is 'good news to all people;' so, why should he not wear a smiling face and a glad heart?"

I did not immediately answer, but sat looking into the fire, as though I might find there a suitable reply. My kind father did not press his question, and, observing my thoughtful air, he opened his evening paper, and began to peruse it.

This talk was about the young pastor of the society of which my father was a member. He had been located there about five months. His bride was Mary Benton, the young lady introduced in the first chapter; her sister Emma now occupied her place as assistant teacher in the Eldon Institute.

The praises of the minister and his wife were on everybody's lips. His talents, and goodness, and genial manners, were proclaimed at the mention of his name. And Mrs. Whitney was the dearest, sweetest woman in the world! Everybody loved her; the rich and genteel admired her refined dignity of manner, and the poor and suffering called her their good angel. Where there was sickness or mourning, wherever temporal or spiritual food was needed, there

was lovely Mary Whitney by the side of her noble husband.

Thus were the characters of the minister and his wife pictured to me, and, had not my mind been warped by prejudice, I should have appreciated and loved them at once.

As it was, I felt embarrassed and half-annoyed when informed that Mr. and Mrs. Whitney had called, and were awaiting me in the parlor. I entered the room, feeling a little awkward. My constraint was quickly dissipated, however, by Mrs. Whitney's easy, affectionate greeting. She met me just as when we were schoolmates, and gracefully presented me to her husband.

Mr. Whitney had a frank, happy countenance; he was far from being handsome, yet his plain features were stamped with intellect, giving them a noble cast. His clear blue eyes wore a beaming light, and his large mouth seemed spiritualized in his genial smile. A thrill of happy animation passed through the circle (there were other visitors present), and I felt, instinctively, that it emanated, like electricity, from the smile of Mr. Whitney. I could not exactly decide whether he had the remarkable faculty of extracting honey from everything, or whether the sunshine within brightened whatever he touched.

He was just such a character as I naturally ad-

mired; but then my mind was in the morbid state, and his cheerfulness reäcted upon me painfully. Life, to me, wore a stern and rugged aspect; and I thought that a true Christian, even if secure of his own salvation, should ever be studying to show the way of redemption to others. So, fully believing the religion I professed, though of a very social temperament, I could not enjoy the amenities of friendly intercourse without self-reproach. Of course, therefore, no one like Mr. Whitney could escape my censure. In his case, recently imbibed prejudices rose up and condemned him, and every smile my diseased imagination counted almost a sin.

The morrow was the Sabbath. The sun rose in unwonted splendor. Without, all was light and beauty; within, were conflicting elements warring upon my peace. A momentous question arose in my mind; should I wound my parents by refusing to accompany them to meeting, or should I go and hear the preaching of what I believed to be a fatal and soul-destroying heresy?

I soon decided upon the point, and, taking my Bible, sat down quietly to its study. When my parents appeared, dressed for church, mother looked

at me in surprise, and said, "Are you not going with us, Marion?"

I shook my head.

My father's face expressed deep grief and disappointment. "I thought, as there is no church of your faith in the place, that, of course, you would accompany us to the sanctuary. Can we not worship the Lord together, even if our faiths are unlike?"

I trembled violently, yet my sense of duty prevailed, and I said, composedly, "Forgive me, father; I cannot go with you; I feel it would be wrong; pray, do not ask me!"

The tears came to mother's eyes, and she was going to plead with me, when father drew her arm within his, and led her away. His face was very sad, almost stern, I thought.

Then I thought of our pew, where I had sat so many happy Sabbaths in the past; and of my father and mother sitting there alone "a twelvemonth;" and now their only child had returned, and would not worship with them. I thought how lonely, how desolate they must feel; and I wept in pity for them, and in pity for myself.

O, it was sad! and yet it was a cross I must bear for the sake of Christ.

After that there was nothing said about my going to meeting. I was allowed to remain at home without

any opposition. I saw it made my parents very unhappy, as it certainly did me; but my religious teachers and my convictions pointed out a certain path of duty, and, feeling like a young martyr, I walked firmly therein.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN.

ALFRED returned at last from college, crowned with honors, buoyant in hope, and radiant with health. He wore high honors, and yet his erect, manly form and lustrous eyes told no tale of wearing study, or of the "midnight oil." Though a hard student, a very book-worm, Alfred was too active, too fond of nature, to sacrifice health to unremitting study, without change or exercise. So his equable, elastic, healthful temperament carried him through his course with undiminished health and spirits.

He was matured, improved, and polished in outward appearance. His elevated conversation evinced a harmonious mind and an enlightened understanding. His open, expressive face was in keeping with an honest, upright heart.

So appeared my friend to my partial eyes, — a union of manly grace, intellect, and goodness.

And when my hand was locked in his, and his smiling eyes looked into mine with such happy sig-

nificance, a delightful spell enthralled my senses. Then was dissolved the gloomy, misty atmosphere surrounding me; then were the fickle, heating, heart-blighting fancies, which I misthought religious fervor, banished, — sent trooping away in darkness; while a broad burst of sunlight flashed upon my awakening heart.

I seemed endowed with a new existence; or, rather, for the time being, I was again as was myself before I became a gloomy, sad religionist. The blood tingled with keener life in my veins; my eyes felt the new light streaming from them.

Mother smiled a little maliciously. "Alfred, it is well you have come," she said, playfully; "your presence acts like a charm on Marion. She has moped and pined ever since she came from school, and I have tried in vain to find a remedy. You seem to have brought the needed elixir."

Deeply blushing, half-vexed, half-amused, I protested against my mother's position as exceedingly absurd.

Mother laughed, and Alfred laughed, too; then he turned upon me such a smile, — a grave, sweet, comprehending smile, — that I was more confused than ever, and the crimson tide rolled again over my burning cheeks.

Alfred enjoyed my distress. His black eyes twinkled wickedly. Then I obtained the control of

myself, and began to look very dignified and resolved; whereupon Alfred became grave again, and sat down by my side.

My mother directly left us alone.

Then we discoursed soberly, yet gladly, of the things nearest our hearts. The past, with its reminiscences both pleasing and mournful, was reverted to; and the future, the bright, untried future, presented delightful pictures of felicity. O, the castles we builded, and the sweet life we lived in fancy! All too bright for realization were our plannings, as we forgot that the threads in the web of life are not all golden ones.

And, still, in my happiness, I heard, in a secret chamber of my soul, a chill whisper, a foreboding knocking at my breast. I felt there was yet wormwood in the sweet cup whose delicious foam I was now quaffing.

I remembered we were not really and entirely one, as we tried to make it appear to ourselves. I remembered that we still worshipped at different altars. He, alas, knelt at an altar which would blight our budding happiness with rayless darkness, if he persisted in his allegiance there! But, O, I would win him to my altar, and he would be saved! I was sure of this.

So the whisper, the foreboding, the wormwood were forgotten. Our first meeting could not be

marred with either. I was so drawn away from my cankering fears and anxieties, so long nursed, but now allowed to slumber, that I was willing to bask in the sunshine, nor desired to touch upon religious themes.

The conformist, the religionist, was merged into the happy maiden. I was my own self again. Would to Heaven the shadows had all been exorcised, never again to darken my mind! O, that in that sacred hour had been obliterated the dark, unnatural phase of my life! But it was otherwise to be. Injured nature must be redressed. Only could the love of God throw light upon my path, showing my mistaken way. And it pleased Him to do it in the storm and thunder-shock; so it was needful, so tenacious was my mind of opinions I had once embraced.

But I will not anticipate.

It was a clear, bright morning. The first snow of the season lay glittering in the sun; it covered the bosom of the earth several inches deep, — winter's downy mantle.

We sat at breakfast, discussing hot rolls and delicious coffee. The keen air vibrated to the merry jingle of sleigh-bells; I looked up, and beheld Alfred at the gate, in a gilded sleigh, with his beautiful pony, Archie. Buried in buffaloes, with only her dear face visible, was his sister Cora. And how fresh and smil-

ing she looked! Months had passed since I had seen such a fine color on her face, or such a joyous light in her eye. Verily, Alfred was a magician, bringing sunshine, and smiles, and roses, with his loved presence. He entered the house with a cheery greeting.

"It is a glorious morning, Marion, and we are going to enjoy it to the utmost; will you ride with us?"

"Will I go? certainly, and without any urging."

My good mother hastened to bring furs and woollen gloves, while I encased my feet in fur-lined overshoes. Then, well wrapped in shawls, with a blue silk hood tied snugly over my ears, I turned gayly to my father, and asked if he thought there was any danger of my freezing?

He smiled affectionately, and answered, "No, my dear; not while your young blood is so full of life and animation as now. Why, darling," he continued, drawing me to him in a fond caress, "you are bright and sparkling as my own May used to be, and ever should be! It makes me glad to see it."

Alfred led me to the sleigh; then there was doubt expressed about our riding all three on one seat, with so many wrappings and buffaloes. But the seat was wide, and we were all small, and we packed in nicely.

"Plenty of room, plenty of room, but not an inch to spare."

Archie pawed the ground impatiently, throwing into the air little, feathery clouds of snow, while his proud neck was beautifully arched. One crack of the whip, and away Archie sped, like a bird on the wing.

Rushing through the keen, bracing air, the tinkling bells sending back a sweet chime in our ears, the sunshine glittering everywhere, all combined to the exhilaration and vitalizing of our spirits.

There is something inspiriting in a sleigh-ride. It animates and quickens the pulse; it lifts the spirit on buoyant wings; its quick, gliding motion imparts a thrilling pleasure; and, with sunshine and gay company, nothing is more delightful.

Our little party keenly enjoyed the occasion, and laughter and merry jests effervesced from our overflowing spirits.

Cora acted more like a wild sprite than anything else, and her glad laugh gushed in melody as of old. But, by strange perversity of temper, laughter, from those lips so long mute to every joyous sound, stirred a plaintive chord in my breast. It reminded me more painfully of the change in her than her touching sadness itself.

Then I found myself mentally speculating on the probability of her continued cheerfulness, and my own joy, if Alfred should embrace our faith. I became silent and thoughtful.

But Alfred brought me back again by his undiminished, inexhaustible cheerfulness; and once more present enjoyment cast out anxieties and sober thoughts.

We dashed by a group of school-boys, shouting, and rolling, and tumbling in the snow, and pelting each other heartily with snow-balls. O, school-boys love the merry winter-time!

A little further on, the wicked, impish wind whisked my light veil away.

"Your pretty wrought veil, Marion, — O, see, the wind has stolen it!" cried Cora.

High up in air it fluttered, as though meditating a flight to the upper regions; then, suddenly diving downward, it scudded along near the ground.

"You hold the reins, Marion, and I'll after the little thing."

"No, no, Alfred, don't chase after it; it is of little consequence, and I'm sure you never can overtake it."

"Yes, it is waiting for me on the corner of that rail; here are the reins, May; and hold them tight, for Archie's antic."

And away Alfred ran after the fly-away veil. Just as he reached out his hand to seize it, the capricious trifle fluttered away in a twinkling — first on one side, then on the other — now high above the head, now resting in a little nook; but always flying

from his grasp. Alfred followed with right good will, and Cora and I laughed till the tears ran down our cheeks at the amusing chase.

At length he captured it with a triumphant shout, and turned back, shaking the treacherous lace playfully in air. His handsome face was flushed and glowing with the exercise, and sparkling with merriment.

I sat, looking backwards, with the reins lightly in my left hand. Suddenly, like the shriek of a mad demon, the car-whistle pierced our ears. We had stopped a rod before a railroad crossing, and now a long train came rushing onward with lightning speed.

At the first sound of the whistle the pony threw up his head, and bounded forward like a deer.

"The cars are coming!" shouted Alfred. "Hold the horse, Marion, — turn him into the snow-drift!"

But I had no control over the excited animal, and we were rushing madly on to destruction.

"Good heavens, they are lost! O, my God! my God!" groaned Alfred, in agony.

I heard the runners grate upon the iron rails, — I heard the mighty engine thundering, groaning, crashing, dashing onward, close upon us, with the alarm-bell wildly clanking in my ears. I shut my eyes with a smothered cry for mercy!

The next instant I felt a slight shock, and was

thrown forward upon Cora. Dizzy, confused, almost stunned, though more with terror than real injury, I stood up and looked around. Our sleigh had just cleared the track, and Archie had run plump into a snow-drift; this caused our sudden stop. The train had flashed by, and was now curving gracefully in the distance.

"O, what a deliverance! Great God, I thank thee!" burst from my full heart.

Cora lay motionless in the bottom of the sleigh. I raised her up; she had nearly fainted, but the thrilling words, "We are safe, Cora! we are safe!" instantly revived her.

"Where is Alfred?" she whispered.

At a little distance, on the other side of the track, he was half-kneeling on the ground, with his back towards us. Poor Alfred! he had turned away that he might not see us die.

"Dear Alfred! dear brother!" we cried together, "come to us; we are unhurt, we are both safe!"

He slowly rose, and looked towards us like one stupefied. One hand he pressed to his brow, the other outstretched with a bewildered air.

"Dear, good Alfred, we are both alive! we are unhurt!"

Still he stood like one in a dream.

"O, Alfred, don't you see us?"

Quicker than thought, a flash of intelligence and

comprehension passed over his ghastly face, and he sprang forward.

"You are both saved! — Cora, Marion, — dear precious ones! Praise God! Bless his name forever!" and he clasped us both in his arms, covering us with kisses and tears.

"I had turned away from the sight of your death, and in that awful moment my soul was struck dumb with agony. I rose, expecting to see my loved ones wounded, bleeding, dying, perhaps already dead. But you are delivered! It seems like a miracle! Let us thank the Lord for his goodness!"

We were silent, and from our hearts went up deep, devout thanksgivings.

We were now nearly recovered from the effects of our fright, — all but Cora, who, still pale and drooping, lay in her brother's arms.

"What shall we do, Marion? Cora is almost frightened to death."

"Here is Mrs. Hunter's house; let us go in and stay until she has recovered."

"That is a good idea. I will drive under the shed, and cover Archie with a buffalo, to punish him for this rascally trick, and leave him to repent at leisure, while we warm and rest ourselves by Mrs. Hunter's fire."

"I know she will welcome us kindly."

"O, here 's your veil, Marion! I have kept it safe in spite of all."

I received it almost remorsefully. "O, the worthless thing! the cause of all our trouble. Little, spiteful, capricious elf! I 'd give it again to the winds if you had not worked so hard to restore it to me."

"O, don't do that, May, as all our troubles have come out brightly. Poor, innocent, unconscious veil!" he said, tying it over my bonnet, and bringing his face, into which the color was slowly returning, close to mine. "Think of nothing but your providential escape, darling. My heart will never cease to give thanks when I remember this hour. But here we are at the house, and good Mrs. Hunter stands at the door to welcome us."

The lady had seen our danger and escape, with mingled consternation and thankfulness, and she overwhelmed us in one breath with condolence and congratulations.

O, horrors, how frightened she was! what a narrow escape! how fortunate, how lucky, we were, and how thankful we must be! But she knew we were awfully frightened; we were all pale, and Cora was white as a sheet.

"Come in, come right in! Poor child, how you tremble! Here, sit in my big rocking-chair; and you,

Miss Marion, and Mr. Eaton, do help yourselves to chairs. I 'm so flustered I hardly know what I 'm about."

Seeing our calmness, she soon regained her usual equanimity, and hurried up the fire under the kettle, for we must all drink some tea; it would be so good for our disordered nerves. Alfred disclaimed against the need of any tea, but the good lady persisted, and he yielded for fear of grieving her. After we were well warmed he proposed going on to the village of C——.

"Are you sufficiently rested, Marion? I have an errand at C——, and must go on; will you go with me?"

I was ready to go, and commenced tying my hood.

"O, but my tea is just ready to drink; wait until you have had some."

"We will leave Cora to your care until we come back," said Alfred, "and she can drink the tea. You really must excuse us now, Mrs. Hunter, though I thank you very kindly."

We left Cora in an easy-chair, sipping her fragrant hyson, and Mrs. Hunter expressed her pleasure in our plan of leaving the dear girl an hour or two with her.

We were happy, though our spirits were sobered and chastened. We talked of our love, of our duties

to each other, and to the world. Not extravagantly, not in passionate, unmeaning phrases, did Alfred tell me how much he loved me, how he worshipped me; not after the fashion of novel heroes, did he call me angel, goddess, beauty; he never once declared that he would die for me; but in truthful, earnest words, he assured me of his undying affection and interest in my welfare.

A half-hour's brisk drive brought us to the city-like village of C——. We rode directly to a hotel. Alfred called for dinner and a private parlor. I was soon seated in a handsome room. My friend excused himself for a little time, and I sat alone, dreaming pleasant dreams; still conscience whispered, "You have not unburdened your breast fully to Alfred; in spite of his perfections he yet lacks one thing. Tell him of your fears, and hopes, and wishes, concerning his spiritual welfare."

"Not yet, not yet!" pleaded my fond heart; "another time will be better!"

Sooner than I expected, Alfred returned. He threw a tiny packet into my lap.

"Is this for me, Alfred?"

"It is for my Marion, if she will accept it."

I unrolled it with eager curiosity, and an elegant ring dropped from a little roll of cotton.

"O, Alfred, what a beautiful present!" I turned the little toy over in my hand, admiring its beauty

and richness; then, raising my eyes to his, I let them speak my thanks.

Alfred's face was very eager and smiling. "Put it on your finger, dearest." I did so, and playfully held the hand up for his inspection. He put it to his lips. "Let it be a sign of our betrothal, and never take it off while our hearts beat in unison."

"Then I think I must always wear it, Alfred."

"As long as you live, May!"

It was Alfred's first gift, and how significant in my eyes! My girlish heart swelled with pleasure in the gift, and love and tenderness for the giver.

After dinner we returned to Mrs. Hunter's. Cora had fully recovered, though not so rosy and cheery as when we started in the morning.

Mrs. Hunter was all hospitality. Alfred must put pony in the barn, and I must take my things right off; she was going to have a quilting-party that afternoon, and not a word would she hear of our leaving until night.

So we consented, and, truth to tell, not much against our inclinations, to stay and see the quilting-frolic. I had scarcely withdrawn my glove when Cora observed the glittering circles on my finger. A meaning smile curved her lip and danced in the height of her roguish eye.

I will not stop to tell about the quilting; it was like all similar parties composed of laughing girls

and sociable matrons. The tea-drinking was a merry affair, but could not be described, such good-natured confusion abounded.

Just as the sun hid his broad disk from view, leaving long crimson streaks upon the white crests of the western hills, we bade adieu to our pleasant hostess and her lively company, and started for home.

Alfred Eaton was received with attention and respect by many who claimed no tie of affection or consanguinity. His sterling integrity, fine talents and acquirements, were well known and appreciated in his native village.

He was invited to lecture before the Lyceum, quite a literary and popular body. He had been, since boyhood, a famous declaimer, and now the villagers were anxious to hear a Lyceum lecture from the young collegian, about whom so many pleasing prophecies had been spoken.

Alfred accepted the invitation, and consented to address the people the ensuing Friday evening. He shut himself up in his study, and for two days and nights labored unremittingly. When the eventful night arrived, the hall was filled with an intelligent and appreciating audience. I sat where I could see the changing play of the speaker's eloquent face, and not a word did I miss of the instructive, classic,

chaste oration. There was no embarrassment, no hesitation, but he was calm and collected from beginning to end.

How proud, how rejoiced I was! Every burst of applause, every whispered commendation, caused my heart to bound with delight.

When the young orator descended from the stand, many pressed round him with congratulations and heartfelt praises. Smiling and bowing to the right and left, Alfred made his way through the crowd to where I was standing. He read my eulogium in my glistening eyes.

"Your silent praises are worth them all, my Marion!" he whispered, as he drew my arm within his.

"Alfred Eaton is a noble fellow!" said my father, heartily. "A noble fellow! He has a great mind, a warm heart, and a true soul! It is a great satisfaction for me to know that, when I must give my daughter into another's keeping, it will be to one so worthy."

"Thank you, dear father, for these praises! His honor is my pride!"

My cup of happiness was full to the brim. My heart, surcharged with blissful emotions, overflowed in joyful tears.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEPARATION.

"A little cloud arose to dim our heaven;
Its shadow fell upon my frightened heart," —
* * * * * *
"O, foolish pride! O, spirit faint and weak!
That would not make one effort to retain,
Or with small sacrifice the treasure seek
Thou wouldst have given thy life-blood to regain."
M. A. H. Dodd.

I DREAMED strange, wild dreams. Fearful visions crowded in upon my sleeping fancies, and drove sweet slumber from my eyelids. I dreamed of sickness, of death, of separation from the idol of my young affections. Again did Miss Ingols breathe into my ear the tale of her fearful bereavement, and I thought my sorrow was like unto hers. Grim nightmare held my senses in his crushing grasp, cold sweat stood upon my forehead, my limbs were numb, my heart chilled with terror.

At length I awoke, exhausted and distressed. When the first ray of the Sabbath morn peeped in at my window, I arose, feverish and heart-sick.

I thought remorsefully of the week of light pleasure I had passed. How could I be happy with Alfred, knowing his danger and seeing his blindness? If I might not instruct my parents, should a secret fear, a single wish or hope of my heart, be hidden from the chosen companion of my life? O, no! I had wronged him and myself by this culpable silence.

I fell upon my knees, imploring divine forgiveness and assistance, and, with agonizing prayers for the salvation of my friend, I promised to use all my powers to lead him to the throne of mercy.

O, if he should die unconverted! My dream haunted my mind, and the thought was agony. But the lover of Miss Ingols mocked at religion; Alfred did not; still he indulged a dreadful error. Then I remembered of having heard Mr. Delano say that such were even more reprehensible in the sight of God than open profaners, as they lead many more astray. Even the morality and integrity of their lives weigh against them, for the world would be deceived and lost by such appearances. So there was little comfort for me, save in the hope that my love and persuasion would soften and subdue his heart.

When the church-bells rang, I peeped through the shutter. My father and mother walked through the gate, both looking up wistfully at my window, as though they thought I might relent, even at that late

hour, and bear them company. My heart smote me, and a sigh struggled up from its depths.

Then Alfred passed by, with Cora on his arm. He, too, looked up longingly, and with a clouded face went slowly on.

I drew back quickly. "O, I have a trial before me! But I will be strong; even friendship and love shall not make me waver!"

At noon Alfred called for me. "Did you oversleep yourself, or are you indisposed, that you did not attend service this morning?" he asked, in a half-bantering way.

"O, no! I rose early, and I am in usual health."

"Then you will go with me this afternoon? Cora is too feeble to go again to-day. You will allow me the pleasure of your company?"

"Excuse me, Alfred, I cannot go with you."

"Not when I so much desire it, dear May? For my sake go just this once."

"I am sorry to deny you, but I cannot do otherwise without doing violence to my convictions of duty."

"Now don't be whimsical, Marion! Do put aside your unnecessary scruples. Remember how many times we have walked together to the house of God. Surely our happiness is at an end if we are always to be thus divided Dear Marion, if you love me, go with me now!'

I hesitated, almost overcome by his persuasion. Then the memory of my morning prayer and vow arose before me, and I was firm again.

"No, no, Alfred, I cannot go! It is in vain you urge me."

"As you please, Miss Lester."

His brow flushed with mortification, and almost haughtily he walked away.

Then the waiting tears were permitted to fall unrestrained, and the victim of a mistaken and false duty murmured that the right path was so rugged and hard to tread.

Evening came, and Alfred was again by my side in our little back parlor. I had expected to see a slight coolness, or pique, in his manner; but on the contrary he was unusually affectionate, though sober and apparently preöccupied in mind. I also had a subject which I desired to approach, yet hesitated, studying how to do it both delicately and pointedly.

But Alfred, with native frankness, almost abruptly broached the subject occupying both our thoughts.

"Marion," he said earnestly, yet gently, "I was both mortified and wounded at your refusal to gratify me to-day; yet I would let it pass without a word, trusting to your generosity and good sense to overcome these unworthy prejudices, were it not for the sake of your father and mother. Your vacant seat

looked mournful to me, Marion; and think you not your parents were lonely? Their sorrow was written on their faces. Their only one, the child of their love, and upon whom they lavish their temporal wealth, and the still richer wealth of their affections, refuses to worship with them in the temple of the Lord! Is this right? Is it like your affectionate, sacrificing self?"

"Alfred, I know it grieves them, and it is a sore trial to me; yet it is my duty, and I do not shrink from it."

"Your duty? No, Marion! You have an unfortunate, mistaken sense of duty. Your parents are worthy, consistent Christians, and even if you deem them embracing some wrong views, as there is no church of your sect in the neighborhood, what possible harm can it do you, or them, for you to attend divine service with them?"

"What if I believe them to be in a great error, a fatal error?"

"O, Marion, your father! — your true, noble, upright, Christian father! — he, whose unblemished life is a monument of praise to himself, — yes, an honor to God! — you question his piety, accuse him of embracing fatal errors, dangerous to Christianity! O, Marion!" He spoke with touching reproach in his tone.

"No, Alfred, O, no! I honor my father, I love

him! I know he is sincere, true to his convictions, the very soul of honor! And still, consistently with all this, he may be fearfully mistaken,— he may be nursing delusive hopes, resting secure in a false doctrine. I believe so, and this is why I cannot worship at the altar where he bows."

"And if you do believe this, you cannot hope to convince him of his errors; he is already past middle life, and his religious faith is ingrown with his very nature. You can never convert him to your position. So, Marion, why not save him this vexation, this heart-ache? Be true to your own loving heart, and overcome your prejudice, — superstition, I had almost said."

"You know I am firm by nature, and, when convinced that a certain course is right, am not easily shaken."

"Yes, my dear girl, I know you have firmness and decision of character; I know you have no fluctuating, credulous mind; and this is why I marvel so greatly at your change of faith. This energy, this self-reliance I have admired and loved in you; but let not an excess of this virtue, which, persisted in, would lose its former charm, cause your own unhappiness and that of all those you love. Dear friend, darling Marion, hear and answer my petition! Abate your firmness on this point. For the sake of your fond

parents, for my sake, whom you profess to love more than all, yield to my request!"

His arms were about me, and he drew me closely to his breast.

"Dear May, for the world I would not grieve you, as your conduct did me to-day! I felt so disappointed, so lonely! I could not bear to have it always thus. If you love me, if you value my happiness, you will never refuse me again. Only meet me at the sanctuary, and I will trust to the future to divest your mind of the clouds of error hanging over it, and then I shall have my own Marion back again, frank, joyous, consistent, as when I first loved her!"

My heart was melted; I was almost subdued. My head dropped upon his shoulder for a moment. Then it seemed as though a warning voice whispered, "Beware, beware! do not listen to Love's sophistries! He is catechizing you, when you should warn and reprove him. Now is the time; be strong!"

I withdrew myself from his embrace, and commenced my defence with becoming dignity.

"You talk about my errors, prejudices, and superstition; you hope I will yet worship God by your side at the same altar! Alfred, that can never be, unless you go with me, not I with you! I gave up a mistaken, unsafe religion, for one sure and stead-

fast, and the entreaties of those I love best on earth cannot wrest it from my grasp."

"God forbid, that my entreaties alone should give you ground for a religious faith. Your own reason, by the light of nature and revelation, must be your guide. I was only pleading for a little tolerance, a little condescension on your part."

"Alfred, if you could only see into my heart! I am filled with apprehension for you, as well as for my parents. You trust implicitly in the mercy of God, forgetting man's free agency, forgetting the conditions! Let us study the Bible together, that you may see the proof of your mistake in the words of holy writ."

"I have studied the Bible, Marion, enough to know that it reveals a loving Father, — to know that Christ came to proclaim good news, which shall be unto all people; but I have not read it enough to purify my heart, and make it all love, like that of my Divine Master; not as much as I ought, Marion; but I will read it the more; we will study the sacred pages together, and then, perhaps, we may be united in this respect as we are in all others."

"I hope so, Alfred!"

"You believe that God is Love, and that Jesus died alike for all?"

"Yes; but then man is a free agent; there are conditions —"

"There are no conditions which can alter God or the Saviour; there are conditions which cause the temporary ruin and wretchedness of sinful man. But, this is my strength and hope, from all this seeming evil good shall be deduced in God's own time."

"It is a beautiful theory, I admit, but, alas, not founded on the word of divine truth! And, O, my friend, this subject is a dangerous one to tamper with! 'As a man soweth, so shall he reap.'"

"True, very true, Marion; every act of our lives has its proportionate reward or punishment; and this reward or punishment is inherent in the very action, and inseparable from it. And, knowing God to be wise, and merciful, and just, I rest happy in the thought that he is the judge of man, not man himself."

"'As death leaves us, so judgment shall find us!'"

He almost disconcerted me by his quick glance of surprise.

"Be careful, Marion, and not quote the oft-repeated words of your ministers or teachers, imagining they are the words of holy writ. I did not dream that these dismal dogmas had sunk so deeply in your heart. I lament you are so changed."

"I changed! I am not, only in those things of which I had need; and you, O, Alfred, if you were changed in some things, it might be better! I dream

of your danger by night; it haunts me by day! And now I would warn you, I would implore you, to pause and think. I cannot find words to tell my inexpressible anxiety!"

Burning tears gushed from my eyes, and fell over my face in a shower of grief. Alfred was touched.

"Forgive me, Marion; I spoke too lightly of your faith. O, indeed, if you believe it so firmly, I wonder not at your grief! The world must look dark to you; heaven shrouded in a pall; and life arid, bitter, barren! O, I pity you, my own love! I pity you and pray for you!"

"You pity me! Well you may, when I view my best loved ones on the brink of endless ruin! Pity yourself, Alfred! Pity and pray for yourself! O, what can I say to you? How can I open your blinded eyes?"

I was clasping my hands and crying piteously.

"Poor child, you are beside yourself! Be calm; compose yourself."

"How can I be calm, when I am shaken with such terrible alarms, and you are so cool and collected? Alfred, I have been outwardly calm too long, and now the anxiety which has been preying upon my heart, rises like a torrent and overcomes me! Alfred, dear Alfred, heed my words!"

"What would you have me do? Your vehemence distresses me."

"What would I have you do? O, heavens! don't you see your danger? Death, desolation, separation, endless woe, unless you seek acceptance of Jesus!"

"Hush, Marion! This is very wrong. You are highly excited with imaginary dangers. I am willing you should talk with me, if you will be calm, and argue quietly. There is no reason in these wild rhapsodies."

I wept upon his shoulder until my passionate emotion was exhausted; then I spoke again, but my voice was tremulous.

"I know there is no reason, no argument in my passionate entreaties. To any other one I might talk calmly, and present my arguments; but I have thought of your conversion so much, and prayed for it so constantly, that I am almost distracted. Truly as I believe in your love for me, I feel as though I were alone in the universe until I am assured of your conversion, which will lead you to the true salvation."

Alfred was silent, only tightening the pressure of his arm about me. An expression of sorrowful perplexity settled down upon his face.

"You have heard me speak of my teacher and friend, Miss Ingols? She made me the confidant of her grief; and that sorrow of hers has haunted me ever since like an awful warning. She loved when she was even younger than I. She became a pro-

fessor; but her lover mocked and despised religion. I don't mean to compare him with you, dear Alfred,—of course not; yet there is a similarity which makes me tremble! She pleaded and expostulated with him, and he laughed at all she said, and left her, scornfully denouncing religion and all its professors. In a few minutes he was brought back to her a lifeless corpse. He was dead, and his last words were in contempt of religion. O, what an awful bereavement! This black sorrow has sat upon her heart ever since then, blighting every source of happiness. Poor, dear Miss Ingols!"

I had wrought myself up to a high pitch of excitement by the repetition of Miss Ingols' sorrow, and I shook with convulsive sobs.

"What does this prove?" said Alfred; "what does it prove? Only that a thoughtless, irreligious young man was suddenly stricken from life, and man pronounced upon him a fearful doom! His love — poor, credulous, unfortunate girl! — believed that he was lost, and has been wretched ever since. O, 't is a beautiful, consistent religion! clothing the mourners in sackcloth and ashes, and making the heart afraid to trust its beloved in the hands of God, the All-merciful Father!"

My tears were quickly dried. I was piqued. Alfred was obstinate, even daring to speak scornfully of what was to me a dreadful reality.

"I am to consider it a great compliment, too, Marion! You hope to enjoy heaven; I am unworthy!"

A flash of wounded feeling burnt my cheek.

"Now, Alfred —"

"Excuse me, Marion, do! I was wrong to speak so bitterly. All this talk will avail nothing; we are both getting nervous; so let us always be silent on this subject. You have confidence in my morality?"

"Certainly!"

"Though I have many faults, did you ever know me to do a mean or dishonorable action? In all my life did you ever know me to speak falsely or deceive any one?"

"Never, Alfred; but why these strange questions?"

"Will not this satisfy you, my Marion? With perfect confidence in my moral integrity, can you not be content to let me worship God as I think right?"

"No, it will not content me! A ceaseless fear for your happiness would harass me. And we are taught, Alfred, that the enlightened, moral, influential man has more to answer for to God, than a reckless sinner, if he misunderstand God's testimony, and tells men of happiness and heaven, when there are ten thousand dangers and quicksands intervening."

Alfred started, with a deep, indignant blush mantling his brow.

"This from Marion — my Marion! She whom I thought so generous, so delicate and ingenuous! I can hardly believe my senses! O, you are changed, every way! You are altogether unlike your former self whom I learned to love when a tiny girl! I wish to mercy that obnoxious school had been blown to the East Indies before you were entered there! While in college I bore insult and reproach for opinion's sake, but I cannot bear it from you! Marion, you are infatuated, fanatical!"

Now it was my turn to start with angry color. Genuine anxiety was extinguished in wounded pride. I turned my head away in haughty silence.

"O, Marion, if it should always be thus! If this difference is never to be done away, where is our promised happiness? Alas, I fear the rosy dreams of hope are already lost in a stern, cold reality!"

My heart started, like an alarm-clock, with wild, irregular motion. The resentful flash had died away from Alfred's face, and a regretful shadow veiled his beautiful eyes. I saw how I had wounded him, but had not he wounded me in turn? "Ah, foolish pride!" And so the hasty words were not stayed.

"There is a remedy, sir."

"How?"

"Our engagement, of which you seem to be weary,

can be annulled. If our happiness cannot be found together, then it must be apart!"

"Do I hear you aright?"

"Undoubtedly; still I can repeat it. We cannot be happy together, for I am firm in my opinion, you obstinate in yours. There would be too much friction in such a union."

"Are you in earnest, Marion?"

"Never more so!"

He seized my hand, holding it tightly. "There is truth in what you say; but is there no other alternative? Can we not be indulgent towards each other?"

A nervous tremor seized me, still my unappeased anger hurried on the catastrophe I began to fear.

"It is a subject of too much moment to be lightly set aside. I should never cease my importunities, and you would become wearied and disgusted with them. If you are determined not to change your religious faith, then, as I have said before, we could not be happy together. You think me changed, unworthy of your love — we had better part."

"Marion, we are both excited, let us not do that which we should afterwards regret. Think a moment before you speak again."

My frightened heart cried: "Retract! retract!" but my wilful, unruly tongue, completely under the dominion of an adverse current of evil, said:

"I am perfectly calm, sir; and I am in earnest.'

"Shall I take you at your word, Marion?"

"Certainly, why should you not?"

He dropped my hand with a smothered groan.

"Your words have forever divided us! Farewell, Marion!"

He strode hastily away, only pausing a moment with a backward glance of anguish and reproach.

There was a quick revulsion of feeling. I began to realize the import of my passionate, unguarded words. I reached out my hands, and would have cried, "Alfred, stay! my own Alfred!" but the words died inarticulate upon my lips. The door closed heavily. He was gone!

And we were parted — forever parted! so Alfred had said! This was no trifling quarrel, like those which had spiced our childish intercourse; there would be no pretty "making up" on the morrow — no sweet reconciliation.

We were parted, and my own unworthy, hateful pride had caused the rupture! A loud ringing was in my ear; my brain grew giddy; a sickening weight oppressed my heart. I tottered to the sofa, and sank upon it, more dead than alive.

Long I lay there, realizing nothing, only conscious of a dull throbbing in my temples, and a heavy, vice-like ache, muffling the beating of my heart. Long I

lay there, soul and body, heart and spirit, crushed, benumbed.

At last the dismal trance ceased to bind me with its more than iron fetters, and I came to myself with a long-drawn sigh and an ague-like shiver. The candle had expired in its socket; the fire had long since died out, I knew by the chill atmosphere; and the starlight only revealed in dim outline surrounding objects. Slowly my faculties resumed their action — memory first. I remembered everything with a desolating sense of bereavement.

What were friendship and love to me now? Alfred was lost — dead — O, worse than dead to me! for, living, he was not mine, and, sick or dying, I was not his to soothe and comfort! The thought was torture. I could not bear it!

And yet it was best our destinies were severed. Alfred was unregenerate, unconverted, and nursing the deadliest errors. But still, O, merciful Heaven! had I been patient, enduring, he might have been saved! And now only the interposing arm of the Almighty could avert his ruin! I wrung my hands, and suffocating moans bubbled up from my agonized bosom.

Alfred was no more to me! We were parted! My own rash hands had turned the sweet stream of happiness into the murky channel of despair. No blessed tears came to mitigate the bitterness of this

overwhelming woe. Prayerless, tearless, motionless, I sat with clenched hands, looking into the appalling future.

I felt a wound in my finger — the hard edge of a ring had been goaded into the flesh, and slightly torn it. It was the ring — the ring given by Alfred's love! He had told me to wear it as long as our hearts were united. O, now it were mockery to let it remain upon the hand which was no longer his! I tried to tear it off, but in my half-frenzied haste it would not move. To my excited fancy it seemed riveted, grown, upon my finger.

At that moment my eye was caught by a small, dark object lying at my feet. I stooped to pick it up. It was a brown kid glove, which had been accidentally dropped by Alfred.

It sent a shock all over me, like the thrill one feels when coming unexpectedly upon some object worn by the dear departed. The touch overcame me; I was dissolved in tears, — salutary tears; they saved my senses from delirium, my heart from perfect blight.

I was brought to my reason, and, covering the dear glove with kisses, I groped up stairs to my chamber. Gently, almost reverently, as though it were indeed a token of the dead! I drew the ring from my finger, and laid it, with the glove, in a small box, and turned the key upon them.

Already was the sky streaked with the glory of coming day, yet it was midnight in my breast. I threw myself upon my bed, weeping and praying for comfort, and strength to bear me up.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE APPEAL.

"WHAT have you done to Alfred, Marion?"

I could not restrain a convulsive start, but, with a powerful effort at self-control, I said, calmly, "Is there anything the matter with him, father?"

"I met him, a few minutes ago, on the street, looking wretchedly pale and sick. I asked what ailed him. He smiled, a ghastly sort of smile, and said he had no bodily ailment, as he knew of. He was hurrying to the depot to take the western train. He would not tell me the cause of his sudden start, nor where he was going, nor when he should come back. Altogether, he acted more like a crazy boy, than a sensible man. Perhaps I am wrong, my daughter, in connecting the cause of his unaccountable behavior with yourself? Am I so?"

"How can I tell? and yet, perhaps, you are right."

He looked into my face searchingly. "Is it possible that you have trifled with that young man?

that, for opinion's sake, you have broken off your engagement with him?"

"Yes, father, our engagement is annulled, and it is best so. With such difference of opinion we could never be happy together."

My father's face wore an expression of stern and sorrowful reproach. "Your religion, as you call it, has darkened and overshadowed your young life; it has brought sorrow and perplexity into the hearts of your parents; and now it bids you tamper with your own heart's deepest affections, — to lightly throw aside the love of one worthy and true. Marion, what strange perversity is this! It passes my comprehension — this infatuation!"

I clutched at a chair for support, for I was shaking from head to foot. The anguish against which I was battling, must have been written on my changing features, for he looked at me until his expression softened and tears rushed to his eyes.

"O, my dear, unfortunate child! you are more to be pitied than blamed. Your understanding is clouded, your reason perverted. You sport with your desires, and fling away happiness. May the Lord God make his face to shine upon you! may he be your guide and teacher! for, I, alas, can do nothing for you, deep and yearning as is my love!"

I could bear no more, and, turning abruptly, I sought my own chamber. At first it seemed that

the tide of painful emotions rushing over my soul must find vent in a storm of sobs and tears. But "No, no!" I said, in self-command, "tears are tell-tales." I crushed down my eyelids to keep back the burning tears; I pressed both hands tightly upon my bosom to subdue the quivering sobs, and soon the tempest was lulled, and outward calm prevailed.

There is, in every woman's nature, growing up beside her love, a certain pride, delicate and peculiar. It seeks to conceal from the world the evidences of her affection; and when her heart knows grief or disappointment, then all her endurance is put in requisition to hide, even from the eye of the dearest friends, the sorrow preying within. Every expression of emotion is delayed until the stricken one is alone with night and her grief.

Thus it was with me. I felt that my happiness was wrecked, that my dream-castle was shattered, come to naught. But within my own heart must be hidden the bitter regret, and night alone witness the swelling tears.

As I sat there, mutely overlooking the past, Cora entered without knocking. She was very pale; her eyes were swollen, and looked as though their beautiful lustre had been washed away by many tears.

"Cora, I am happy to see you; take my easy-chair."

She sat down without speaking, looked at me reproachfully, then suddenly burst into tears.

"What is the trouble, darling?" I asked, bracing my nerves, for I guessed her affliction.

"O," she sobbed, "Alfred acts so strangely! He has gone off somewhere, and I don't know how long he will stay. I shall be so lonely, so homesick without him!"

"Don't worry about it, dear. It is some business, perhaps, and he will come home soon."

She removed her handkerchief from her face, and looked at me again. "Marion, don't you know why he has gone? He is in trouble, — O, don't you know what it is? He would go off, in spite of all my entreaties, and he strained me to his breast, and called me his only darling, his only friend! What did he mean, Marion? Can it be possible — tell me, is it true, that you have taken back the vows you gave him, because he does not think just as we do on religion, — because his opinion is not like yours?"

"Cora," I said, trying to speak steadily, "Alfred and I had a long talk Sunday night. We found that we could never agree on the subject of religion; we both thought we never could be happy together, and — and I said — we concluded we had better part."

"That 's it! I knew it was that!" cried Cora, nervously. "Alfred is n't a convert; so you think he is n't good enough for you. You think he is a

wicked, unregenerate sinner, and so you cast him off, — my dear, good brother Alfred! O, Marion, how could you! It is not like you — you did not mean it!"

"How sensitive you are, Cora! If Alfred and I agree to disagree, and are contented to be parted, why should you take on so?"

"It is the greatest wish of my heart to see you the bride of my brother, dear sister May; and if truly you and Alfred were content to be parted, I should be unhappy. But you must have discharged Alfred, for he is so wretched! O, Marion, he loves you so fondly! How can he ever get over his disappointment? And we had all planned so much happiness together! I was to be your own sister, and you was to nurse me so tenderly when I am ill; and if I should die, I thought Alfred would have you left to love him; and now — now it is all over, and I shall have no sister, and when I die he will be left alone!"

She flung herself into my arms, drowned in tears, while my own fell upon her golden tresses.

"I can tell you how it was," she said, between her sobs; "you argued until you both became excited, and then there was a lover's quarrel. Now, May, can't you make it up? Alfred will come back, and you will receive him kindly? Do say you will, Marion!"

She looked up with a pleading expression upon her sweet face.

"I shall always receive Alfred kindly, of course; but there will be no making up, as you call it; he would not wish it, any more than I. I can be your sister, though, and will nurse you when sick, just as much as though I were Alfred's bride; and all for love for your darling self."

"You can't make me think Alfred is satisfied. Did n't I see his sorrow? — O, how his heart must ache, poor, dear Alfred!" She fell to crying again. Her tender, loving heart was filled with sympathetic sorrow.

"I thought you loved Alfred, Marion."

"And I did, most truly."

"Did! — then it is past; your love is turned to hate?"

"O, Cora, don't, don't talk so!"

"Did I hurt you? I did n't mean to. And Marion, you surely do love him still! I know it by your looks. Your lips are very white and quivering, and you press your hands over your heart. O, you will be true to this heart! you will recall Alfred by renewed promises of love!"

"Cora, I have pride as well as love. Shall I recall a lost lover?"

"But you will let me do it, Marion? A little hint,

a very little one, and he will come back rejoicing. Do say I may!"

"Cora, I forbid you! Not the least word, not the slightest hint of such a thing! If I knew I should never see another happy moment, I would not so demean myself."

"Dear Marion, let me persuade you! I will write to Alfred, and tell him I fancy you will smile upon his return. Such a gentle hint as that would not demean you, May; it would be only foolish little Cora who gave it, and he would think it all right."

"Never, Cora; never write like that! I tell you it is better as it is. Our religious opinions are so unlike! He will soon find another more worthy of his love, and I — I shall in time, perhaps, learn to be happy without him."

My self-control was giving way. Cora's agitation induced a violent fit of coughing, which suspended her entreaties. As soon as she could speak, she began again:

"It is all pride, nothing but pride; and though it may be very honorable, I cannot think it right when it comes before your happiness, and that of one so good and true as Alfred. Look at me, May. See how my flesh has wasted away. I fear I am very unwell, and I know I am growing worse instead of better. You have driven my only brother away from me, and my home is so lonely! Do you love your

poor orphan friend? If you do, you will make me happy when it is so easy a thing!"

Deeply affected, I drew the weeping girl to my breast. "My darling Cora, I would sacrifice much to make you happy, but this which you ask is impossible. If Alfred himself were by my side this moment, with words of love and reconciliation on his lips, I would not hear them; at least, I would only promise him my friendship. Now that this rupture has occurred, much as I regret it, I will never be anything more to Alfred, until he is convinced of his mistaken belief, and gives strong evidence of a hopeful conversion."

"O, Marion, Marion!" began Cora, but a paroxysm of coughing checked her words. Cough, cough, cough! O, such a suffocating, harrowing cough! It struck a knell through my heart. She leaned back in my arms struggling and gasping for breath; fighting with all her feeble strength against that incessant, dreadful, merciless cough! Every selfish emotion was now lost in intense anxiety for my distressed friend. I was on the point of calling on my mother for help, when the spasm ceased; a fearful pallor overspread her face, and the handkerchief she removed from her lips was deeply stained with crimson. I could scarce suppress a shriek of terror. I laid her down upon the lounge where we had been sitting, and ran in haste for my mother.

I found her, and implored her to hurry to Cora's side. The poor girl lay just as I had left her; she had fainted, and her handkerchief, saturated with her life-blood, had dropped to the floor.

I was panic-struck, and walked back and forth, vainly crying, "What shall we do? O, what shall we do?" But mother, though shocked, was self-possessed; she sent her maid for a doctor, and set about restoring animation to the death-like figure before her.

Cora's aunt Fanny came, filled with fond alarm, and all night did they watch by the darling girl. In the morning, with the utmost caution, she was carried home, and laid on the bed in her own beautiful chamber. Not whiter than her cheek was the snowy drapery surrounding her, and, as I gazed upon her with a failing heart, I felt that health's roses would never bloom again for her.

CHAPTER XV.

CORA'S ILLLESS.

"And all our thoughts ran into tears,
And all our hopes turned into fears,
And sunshine into dismal rain!"

BEAUTIFUL CORA—graceful, merry, joyous Cora—tender, loving, grieving Cora—was quickly and surely passing away. There was little more of earth for her, but a few days, at best. So said the physician, turning mournfully away.

Insidious disease had long been preying upon her vitals, and now a short and rapid decline would end the struggle with life. Great God, must this be! must one upon whom our hearts lavish such wealth of love, be borne forever from our sight? Must death breathe upon her loveliness, and quench the light of her eye, and chill her heart, and stiffen her limbs? Yes, it must be; earthly love can only watch around her pillow, hoping and fearing, waiting and praying, until the Jordan is passed, and the victory is won.

She lay day after day, scarcely speaking, with her violet eyes open and fixed, and a mournful expression ever deepening in them. O, it was inexpressibly sad to watch the going-out of that young life! And day by day, and hour by hour, she faded before our eyes, seemingly as fast as a snow-wreath melts beneath the sun's warm rays.

Cora was attended by fond and faithful nurses: her aunt, who was a gentle, motherly woman; and I, who devoted my whole time to my sick friend; and, lastly, her brother with the most assiduous and touching kindness hovered round her couch.

Alfred had been immediately recalled, and he came stricken with grief. We met daily by the couch of our loved one, with a quiet "good-morning," or "good-evening," nothing more being ever exchanged between us, unless it were some remark pertaining to the sick-room. Our eyes never met, except with a quick, passing glance, and even that would start my heart into a painful beating.

Cora seemed unconscious of the change, or to have forgotten there had ever been any. I was thankful for that, and was careful that nothing should remind her of it.

I knew Alfred still loved me, and my heart never beat more fondly for him. The most constant watchfulness and composure of manner on my part only, preserved the barrier of coldness and constraint un-

broken. I was partly sustained by pride, and partly by an undefined yet delicious hope. I was unshaken in my determination never to unbend towards him until he had acknowledged the falsity of his position. If he loved me as I believed, and having lost me, might he not be led to study upon the subject of our difference; and, pondering upon it, might not he be brought out of darkness into light? Our separation might in the end result in his salvation and my own rejoicing. These thoughts comforted me; this hope was the only star I could discern in my overclouded horizon.

Alfred asked Cora's permission to invite the Rev. Mr. Whitney to call upon her, and she passively acquiesced, as she did to every proposal. Mr. Whitney came, and, in spite of myself, I inwardly confessed that his manners and conversation were very becoming in a religious teacher beside the bed of sickness. He was cheerful, yet subdued, and his voice took a peculiarly sweet and gentle intonation. He seemed to know just what to say, and exactly how to say it. It was plain he had often stood as counsel and comforter to the sick and dying.

He remained some time, and yet Cora seemed refreshed instead of being wearied. He appeared to leave a soothing influence behind, which ministered to us all.

One day I found Cora alone. She was reclining

in a large cushioned chair surrounded by pillows. She wore a tasteful muslin wrapper, and her golden hair lay in native luxuriance upon her shoulder. The hectic burned upon her cheek, and a painful, intense light streamed from her eyes.

I bent over her tenderly. "I am glad to see you off that tiresome bed. Are you better, darling?"

The invalid slightly shook her head, and closed her eyes. Tears, like crushed pearls, glistened on her lashes. "No, no," she said, in touching accents, "I am not better — I never shall be! I shall die, I know it, Marion! Young as I am, I must leave this bright, beautiful world. O, Marion, how can I bear to die, so young, so unprepared!"

She covered her face and wept. I took up one little transparent hand, and kissed it many times with deep emotion.

"My own Cora, I cannot deceive you; we can keep you but a little while. It is hard to die so young, and God knows how our hearts are wrung at the thought of separation. But I would that you were resigned. Can you not fix your mind upon the green, immortal shores? Let hope give you a foretaste of that heaven you are so soon to enjoy."

She uncovered her eyes, and looked at me with an expression which startled me.

"Marion, you believe I have a hope in Jesus. Alas, alas, it is not so! I am unworthy, unaccepted of

God. I was baptized, I joined the church, and sat at the communion-table; but I was unworthy. I was afraid to do otherwise. It was fear of hell, not love of God, which actuated me. Will such conversion satisfy the Almighty? Will Jesus accept such repentance? O, no, no, no! Now death is beckoning me away; I have no rock of safety; Jesus is far from me!"

I was dreadfully shocked at this confession, but soon rallied. Cora had little self-esteem, and no self-reliance; her mind was weakened, as well as her body; she undervalued herself, and was distressed by unnecessary fears. Thus I thought, and tried to soothe and assure the sick girl.

But she heeded no words of comfort, and piteously besought me to show her the way of salvation — to tell her how to be saved — to tell her what she should do to reconcile God to her.

"O, Cora, darling! don't you know the way? It is Jesus. Pray to him, and he will lead you."

"I do pray, O, so fervently! But Jesus seems a great way off, and I am afraid that 's why he will not hear my prayer. O, Marion, the valley of the shadow of death is dark to me, and I am afraid, I am afraid to tread therein!"

Aunt Fanny now came in, and, seeing the excitement of her patient, removed her to her bed, and enjoined the strictest silence upon me.

That was the longest and saddest day I passed. It was dreadful to have Cora so unreconciled. And was it possible that Christ was indeed far from her? Every pulsation of my heart was a prayer that He would light the way to her feet, and give her a sure and genuine hope.

The next morning I was detained from her bedside until a late hour. I found her very tranquil. "Our friend Mary, Mrs. Whitney, has been here," she said, "and she talks so comforting! Her words seemed like medicine to my heart."

"I am very glad you enjoyed her call, dear one."

"She has promised to spend an hour with me every morning, and I am very glad of it."

I was pleased for the sake of my friend, and yet, obeying a feeling I did not really understand, I delayed going to see Cora, every morning, until after Mrs. Whitney had made her call.

Both the minister and his wife became frequent and welcome visitors. Cora seemed to love the sound of their voices. Their influence over her was wonderful; she became serene and even cheerful, and at length could speak of death with quiet resignation.

Though vexed with misgivings, I could not but be grateful. My cherished friend was nearing the river of death, the dark waves were rolling at her feet. But each hour her heart grew stronger, and she smiled more brightly upon us. Jesus had heard her prayer;

and, trusting in Him, she was undismayed, for He would lead her safely through.

Thus she descended into the valley, calmly and peacefully. Love waited upon every motion, and unseen bands of angels were hovering near, ready to guide her across the waters!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SLEEP.

"He giveth his beloved sleep." — PSALMS CXXVII. 2.

"Of all the thoughts of God, that are
Born inward into souls afar,
Along the psalmist's music deep,
Now tell me if there any is,
For gift or grace, surpassing this —
'He giveth his beloved sleep.'"

ELIZABETH B. BROWNING.

WATCHING and grief had made me nearly ill, and so one morning I rested, and did not visit Cora until afternoon. As I entered her chamber, I felt intuitively that "the hour was nigh at hand."

A mysterious brightness veiled the young girl's face, and peace breathed forth from her smile. Disease had dealt kindly with her loveliness. Though the roundness of health had departed, there was no ghostly sharpness of outline in her features or limbs. Her beauty seemed etherealized — ten-fold intensified! The waves of her magnificent hair were spread over the pillow, and the pearly brow beneath appeared the

abode of quietness and rest. She folded her hands upon her breast, and lay there like an exquisitely sculptured image of Patience and Hope.

Some distance from the foot of the bed, Alfred paced softly back and forth, with the lines of deep sorrow written on his brow. How I longed to breathe into his ear a word of love and comfort!

Good aunt Fanny sat on one side of the couch, and on the other Mary Whitney with her placid face and voice of music. There was a hush on every heart, and, in silvery accents, she took up a strain of heavenly consolation. She read:

"'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

"'In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.'"

What a trusting smile parted Cora's lips! The words of the Divine Comforter were ministering spirits to her soul. And, as Mary read on, a look of holy placidity deepened on her face.

Awe-struck, I held my breath, lest the sacred spell should be broken.

There was a gentle ringing of the door-bell, and a sound of footsteps below. Aunt Fanny left her seat and went down stairs noiselessly. She came back with a companion, and I heard her say, before opening

the door, "She is very low, and cannot bear much conversation."

It was Mr. Delano. Rejoiced to see him then and there, I held out my hand, which was taken with a cordial pressure. I introduced him to Alfred, who bowed without speaking.

"I was passing through your place," said Mr. Delano, "and hearing that your sister, a dear young friend, and a lamb of my flock, was ill, I felt it to be my privilege to call upon her."

Alfred bowed again. "You are welcome, sir; please be seated;" and he continued his melancholy walk up and down the room.

Mr. Delano approached the bedside. A shadow flitted across the invalid's placid brow, yet she smiled a welcome, and tried to raise her feeble hand. He took it in his, and said, "I am grateful for the privilege of seeing you again, my dear girl."

She smiled again, but her sweet serenity was disturbed. His presence seemed to awaken painful associations.

"When the shores of life are receding, it is pleasant to know that the pilgrim is a Christian, and hath the promise of salvation. Is your heart calm, and your mind prepared for the change awaiting it?"

"Yes," she whispered faintly; but in that moment the angelic brightness of her countenance was hidden, and lost in the gathering shadows of anxiety. Her

eyes roved restlessly from his face to mine, and from me to Alfred.

I began to regret Mr. Delano's presence, and mentally to reproach him. Perhaps others might need such questions; but why should he disturb the dying hour of one so innocent and child-like? What little she lacked I felt would be graciously overlooked by the heavenly Judge. She was almost an angel now!

But the reverend gentleman, unconscious of my mental ejaculations, went on in his conversation.

"I am happy to hear your answer," he said; "I believed it would be so. I was sure your professions were real, and your conversion of God. It is the hope of life through Jesus that sustains you now. Like a young Christian you repose in His arms."

A look of wild alarm shot across her features, and she cried out with unnatural strength, "O, you have waked me from a dream of false security! Alas, I am unworthy to be called a Christian! My professions were but mockery, for it was fear which actuated me. I thought more of hell, than God, or heaven!"

"Sir," said Mrs. Whitney, "you are disturbing our invalid. I beg you to drop the exciting subject. Her mind has been tossed with fears and doubts, and now the love of God has given her peace."

"Madam, she is a lamb of my flock; she received the baptism at my hands, and I have a sacred right

to question her relative to her religious experience. From her language I am led to fear that she has fallen from her high estate. She acknowledges that she has been reposing in a false security, and it is well that she is awakened to a true sense of her condition before it is too late."

"Too late! O, is it too late?" cried Cora in a piercing voice. "Help me, help me, or I shall perish!"

"Pray to God, believe in Jesus, and he will help you."

"O, I remember everything now! Your presence brings back those dreadful, dreadful days! I thought I had found peace at last, — I thought heaven was close at hand, — but you have awakened me from that delusive dream. O, it is dark, dark to me!"

I wanted to fly to Mr. Delano, and push him from her bedside; but I felt as if bound hand and foot. O, why did not Alfred heed what was going on? How could he keep pacing back and forth, so deaf to everything?

She threw up her hands wildly, and tossed from side to side with almost supernatural strength. It was the energy of despair.

"Save me, save me!" she cried; "you pray to God for me, for I am afraid. O, it is so dark, and I am dying! O, I'm afraid, I'm afraid to die! Won't anybody help me? Can't you pray for me?"

"I will pray for you, poor, misguided child."

"Do, O do! for I am dying, dying, and there 's no light there!"

Alfred turned quickly; his mind had been indrawn, but he began to comprehend the scene. With an authoritative gesture he said, "Mr. Delano, is this your mission, to distract the dying? Let my poor sister rest in quiet."

"What is the quietness of an hour to an eternity of unrest?"

"O, Alfred, dear Alfred! do help me, for I am afraid!"

"Peace, sir!"

Alfred spoke in a deep, impressive tone. Mr. Delano withdrew to the window, with a haughty and injured air, and Alfred bent tenderly over his beloved sister.

"Cora, darling sister, there 's nothing to be afraid of. I am with you."

"But you can't save me from the wrath of God. Nothing can, for I am foredoomed! O, why was I born, to die so young, and so unprepared? I am afraid! I am afraid!"

She covered her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out some baleful vision, while a visible shudder thrilled her frame. This great agitation threatened a speedy dissolution; and, merciful Heaven! would her last words be a shriek of despair! Sick and faint with terror, I leaned upon the table for support.

Alfred burst into a wail of agony. "Mrs. Whitney, comfort her if you can! I cannot speak to her." Saying this he resumed his monotonous walking, and weeping as if broken-hearted.

Mrs. Whitney began to make gentle, mesmeric passes over Cora's head and shoulder, meanwhile repeating comforting passages of Scripture. But the agonized girl continued her moan, "I am afraid! I am afraid!"

At this crisis Mr. Whitney came in. Observing Cora's agitation, he looked round inquiringly. "What is the matter with the dear girl? Why is she so distressed?"

No one answered. His eye fell upon Mr. Delano, and I read in a glance that he comprehended it now.

"Mr. Whitney, Mr. Delano, the minister who baptized our Cora," said aunt Fanny between her sobs.

Both gentlemen bowed slightly.

"Mr. Whitney, you are good and kind; you will help me! Show me how I can be saved!" cried Cora.

"Calm yourself, my sweet girl; there, let me smooth your pillow, and lay your head upon it. Don't you feel better now?" The wild, half-maniac expression softened on her face, and she shut her eyes with a succession of quivering sobs.

Highly as I regarded Mr. Delano, and in spite of

my prejudice against the sentiments of Mr. Whitney, I felt that the latter was best adapted to give comfort to my dying friend.

Cora spoke again in plaintive, heart-touching tones, "I am going to die, and I have not reconciled God to me. Dear sir, do tell me how to die so that he will receive and love me!"

"Nay, poor child, it is you who are unreconciled, not God. He is unchangeable love. Fear not to trust your soul in his hands. 'He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that the world through him might be saved.' Paul says, 'For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.'"

"O, tell me more, tell me more!" she murmured, pleadingly.

"'He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord shall wipe away all tears from off all faces.' 'He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.' 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear.' 'We love him, because he first loved us.' Trust in God's love, Cora; trust in Christ's saving power!"

"'T is sweet to hear your words; they soothe me; they soften this dreadful fear, and yet I am perplexed.

Others tell of hell, and vengeance, and fearful retribution. I am still afraid to die!"

Great tears gushed over her wan face. I groaned in anguish of spirit.

"Cora, shall I pray to God to send you this holy Comforter, and give you peace?"

"Yes, O, yes; for I need it sorely!"

Mr. Whitney had knelt, and we were about to follow his example, when Cora beckoned to Mr. Delano, saying sweetly, "You will join us, my friend?"

He hesitated; his proud heart rebelled. But the pale, spiritual face, with its pleading gaze, overcame him. He could not resist the appeal of one standing at the shadowy portal of death. He came forward a few paces and fell upon his knees. A satisfied smile flitted across Cora's face; she folded her hands devoutly.

I tried to raise my thoughts to Heaven, but strange and conflicting emotions warred upon each other in my aching breast.

The words and tone of the pastor breathed over my soul with a subduing power: —

"Our Heavenly Father!"

The moisture stole beneath my eyelids, and my spirit cried, "Our Heavenly Father!"

Eloquently, fervently, he prayed; touchingly simple, thrillingly earnest, was the petition borne up to

the Father's ear. I felt a portion of the blessing he craved fall like scented dew upon my heart.

I rose to my feet, comforted and strengthened. Alfred still knelt, with his face hidden in the bed-clothes.

Cora slept, so like an image of death one might have thought the spirit really flown, but for the slight undulation of her bosom. The tranquil brightness I had before observed illuminated the beautiful face.

Mute, motionless, scarcely breathing, we stood around her bed-side. Methought if her spirit floated away on that balmy slumber, it were a sweet way to die. Yet my heart yearned to see once more the light of those curtained eyes, and to hear her voice assuring us that she died in peace.

Mr. Delano stood at a little distance, with a gloomy, almost sullen, gathering of his brows. Alfred did not change his humble position. I longed to kneel by his side, and mingle my tears with his, that our mutual grief might be assuaged by sympathy. But that was not my privilege. I could not intrude upon his sorrow, remembering how I had wronged him.

As I gazed upon the sleeper's face, a change came over it, — a chill, dark shadow, — unmistakably, undeniably the shadow of death's wing. A suppressed

cry rose to my lips. The watchers by that couch exchanged startled, grieving glances.

Anon another change; a softly-dawning smile parted her lips. She slowly unclosed her eyes, like one awakening from a delicious dream. A heavenly lustre transfigured her face, like the face of an angel.

"I 'm not afraid now!" Sweet as the harp's music stole those words into my soul.

"I 'm not afraid now!"

She looked upon us with an enlightened, comprehending gaze. Her spirit, partly disenthralled, saw and understood the mystery of life and death.

She spoke clearly, and without pain or weakness.

"I thought I was borne to the gates of heaven on the wings of that prayer. I heard heavenly voices, I seemed filled with light, and a thrill of unutterable joy pervaded my soul. I 'm not afraid to die! God is my Father! I feel it! I know it!"

Alfred sprang to his feet, and bent forward, listening to her transporting words.

"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Whitney," continued the dying one, with sweet tranquillity, "I bless you for your love and kindness; and, when you are nearing the shores of eternity, may you be cheered by the gracious assurance which makes my dying pillow the portal of heaven.

"And, dear aunt Fanny, don't cry; I am going

home! I will watch over you and love you in heaven. Good-by till we meet there!"

The good lady pressed the extended hand to her heart, and turned away in an agony of tears.

"Mr. Delano,"—the gentleman drew near,—"if any should ask how Cora died, tell them the All-Father breathed upon her departing spirit; tell them I died believing, knowing that the love of God is sufficient for us all! Farewell, dear sir, and the Lord grant that your faith may become enlarged and purified!

"And now, my brother, my sister, I must bid you farewell." The others drew back, and Alfred and I stood by her pillow. "Alfred, I know you will mourn for me, but not without hope. Your blessed faith will sustain you, and in time you can speak cheerfully of my departure. I will be your guardian spirit, if the Father is willing. Wipe your eyes, my own Marion. If you felt what I feel, and knew what I know, you would rejoice rather than weep. You recollect all my painful struggles, and doubts, and fears; you realize in your own heart the gloomy shadows which our religious faith created. O, Marion, God is love! I would I could make you feel it as the Father himself hath revealed it unto me. 'T is a fearful thing to limit the love of God, or the saving power of Christ! My dear sister, study the word

of God, study nature, and these things will be clear to your mind.

"Comfort Alfred, Marion, for he will be lonely. O, I remember, a cloud has come between you! That should not be. Marion, lay your hand in Alfred's, that I may die feeling that my two dearest ones are united. Dear Marion, do it for my sake!"

I looked at Alfred. The language of his eyes were, "For Cora's sake; — I will require nothing of you, only gratify our beloved by placing your hand in mine."

My eyes answered his in similar words. I laid my hand passively in his open palm; it received no pressure. I began to tremble from the intensity of my double grief, and would have fallen but for a powerful effort of will.

Cora's eyes lighted with joyful affection. "It is well," she whispered; "may your hearts be united as are now your hands. Bless you, bless you, dear ones!"

Her fictitious strength was fast ebbing away. She looked around with a faint smile, and then appeared to sleep.

Suddenly she started, crying rapturously, "Mother, I come! O, peace — joy — heaven!"

The upraised hand fell lightly on the counterpane. Her spirit had flown! But the impress of celestial joy seemed left upon the still, marble face.

Alfred's tears rained upon the pearly brow. "She has fallen asleep at last!" he murmured.

"Yes, she sweetly sleeps in the Father's arms!" said Mr. Whitney, reverently.

CHAPTER XVII.

ARTHUR'S PASSION AND INFIDELITY.

"Darkness and void! no future! not a ray
Of welcome light! a cold, chill night,
Lacking the break of day!
An ending of the whole career;
A fatal stopping-place in life's swift race;
A mingling of cold clay, without a cheering ray
Of hope! nipped at life's birth!"

We laid our Cora by her mother's side in the church-yard. The softly-falling snow soon covered the hallowed mound. There is an inexpressible desolation in the thought of leaving our beloved alone in earth's wintry bosom, with the snow piled high above the lately-glowing heart, and the chill winds shrieking above the dreamless bed. I knew her spirit was rejoicing in light, and yet my soul was so earth-bound, I could only think of her as lying shrouded and coffined in the damp, dark grave.

A pall hung before my eyes; it shut out the light of heaven, and blackened the sweet phases of social life. My bereaved heart mourned the death of two,

for now was Alfred truly lost to me. Immediately after the funeral he had left the place, and the fairy cottage, lately so happy a home, was left untenanted and alone.

It looked so mournful to me, that closed and empty house! The sight of it augmented my misery, and so I fastened my window-blinds, and shut myself up in my own room, a prey to gloomy sorrow.

The fond endearments of my parents had no power to assuage my grief, and my religion was too dead to revive the energies of my crushed and bleeding heart.

Late one afternoon I thought to indulge my melancholy by visiting Cora's grave. I threw on a bonnet and shawl, and passed out unnoticed by any of the family. The sky was black with gathering clouds, and fierce gusts of wind bowed the naked branches of the trees. I heeded not the weather, — or, rather, liked it, it accorded so well with my mental atmosphere.

As I neared the spot, a form arose from the grave. I was retreating in alarm, when a well-known voice arrested my steps. "Marion Lester, do not be alarmed. Have not I the same right to weep over this dust that you have?"

The voice was that of Arthur Willis; but I could hardly believe the worn and haggard face, and wildly-gleaming eyes, and long hair, and disordered dress,

could belong to that elegant and fastidious young man.

"Arthur Willis, how came you here? why came you here? It is inexplicable to me."

He dropped down wearily upon the ground, and clasped his hands about his knees, with such a look of utter despair, that I felt my bitter sorrow was surpassed by his.

"You wonder why I am here," said he in a plaintive monotone; "but you never knew how I loved her; she never dreamed of it; I hardly knew it myself! I loved her, adored her! beautiful, angelic Cora! I looked upon her as a superior being, as she really was. The ground she trod upon was sacred to me; the air she breathed perfumed to my senses; and her face and smile, how they are pictured in my heart!"

He bowed his head upon his knees, and was silent a moment, then looked up with a stern and wild expression.

"I never told her I loved her, but I meant to when the world should smile more brightly on me, and then we were to dwell in an Eden together. Now she is dead! Her lovely form and angelic face, her loving heart and priceless mind, are all blighted together! She is dead! Don't you see the sun cannot shine through the clouds of mourning? At night the stars will be lost in gloom, for she lies cold and

still! Hear the wailing of the winds! It is for beauteous Cora! O, I would the sun might never shine again; that the stars would ever hide their faces; that nature would never come to life in spring-time again — for Cora is gone forever! O, Cora, Cora, that I were lying by your side, and then I'd care not whether summer or winter, flowers or frost, reigned above us!"

Filled with dismay and surprise, I strove to find words to comfort the half-demented young man. The poignancy of my sorrow was softened and almost forgotten in sympathy for the wretched one before me.

"Arthur, it is dreadful to part with our beloved Cora; but there is hope in Jesus. She is not dead, but risen to a better and higher life."

"Don't tell me that!" he cried, sharply; "I know better. There is no heaven nor hell, — no future! Death is an endless sleep, and I would it had fallen upon me now!"

"Have you forgotten the revelation of God?"

"Don't talk to me of God! I tell you there is no God!"

I began to doubt his sanity, and looked at him in pitying silence.

"Once I thought there was a God, but I know better now. The God men worship is a fickle, changeful God, loving and hating, blessing and curs-

ing, just like man. Men are fools to quarrel about a being that is not."

"Now, Arthur, you cannot mean what you say. I don't believe you are in earnest!"

A bitter, mocking smile wreathed his lips. "Deluded girl, I tell you there is no God! The chaos, the discord, the sins and sufferings of life, all deny the existence of a Supreme Being. Call it all nature, or chance, or what you please, for I tell you there is no controlling, ruling spirit; else why would the good and lovely be cut down in the morning, and the wretched and sinful live on until night? O, Cora! Cora!" he cried, being again overcome with the tiding waves of grief, "thou art no more forever! Never, never shall I see thee again! Oblivion, night, has fallen on thy glorious beauty!"

Again that look of wild and stern despair. His hands were clenched, his teeth set, and his eyes gleamed with an unnatural light.

I was struck with horror. "It is a dreadful thought — annihilation — no God — no heaven! — Arthur, your trouble has unsettled your mind. O, study the precepts of Christ; seek religion, and you will behold light beyond the darkness."

He rose to his feet with a threatening air. "Religion!" he hissed through his teeth, "religion! it is a curse, a blight! Don't speak the word beside her grave!"

Somewhat intimidated, I drew back a few steps. "O, Arthur, Cora loved religion. She was a Christian."

"And did n't it kill her? did n't it kill her? Shall I seek what withered the life in the heart of my love? Never! I will hunt it down! I will annihilate it if I can! — Religion! I will tell you the history of it with me. When I was a child, a mere babe, the word was a bugbear to me. I must get religion, or hell would get me; I must love God, or he would hate me. And, when I became a man, I thought to devote my life to the saving of my fellow-creatures; my heart was full of high purposes and pitying compassion. But because I used my reason a little, instead of the creed, I was put down by religionists, and prematurely driven from their ranks by persecution. This was enough to destroy my confidence; but I saw more. Did n't that revival bring clouds, and darkness, and fears? Did n't the young and joyous become sad and gloomy as they became religious?

"And you, Marion Lester, were a frank, ingenuous, happy girl; but religion spoiled you. Your charming vivacity was lost; you grew cold, haughty, and self-righteous.

"And Cora! her smile was light, her voice melody! O, my heart burned within me as I saw the blight fall on her! Her smile faded, her

voice became low and plaintive, and her music-laugh drowned in tears! These are the effects of that religion which you bid me seek!"

"This is heresy! Arthur, think of your state at the judgment-day, if you persist in this dreadful belief."

He leaned towards me, and whispered, "They say she is doomed, and, if so, I will be doomed too! Heaven would be hell without her; hell would be made happy by her presence! Dr. Severe told me she was dead; that she had renounced religion, retracted her professions, and died without a hope. He said she was doomed! His horrible words made me what I am! My heart is withered, my brain is afire."

The winter winds pierced me through, but his words penetrated to the very core of my heart. A superstitious fear oppressed me. The tall head-stones loomed up grimly in the gathering shades of night. The glaring eyes of the insane man paralyzed me; my teeth chattered and my limbs trembled. I would have refuted his dreadful words; I tried to tell him Cora died in peace; but my tongue refused its office.

Arthur sank down upon the ground again. "Go away, Marion Lester, go away! You do not pity me; you disturb me. Let me weep alone by Cora's grave. Cora! Cora! — but she does not hear me — never can!"

He threw himself upon her grave with a bitter wail.

I glided away with fleet steps, leaving that wreck of intellect and manhood grovelling in despair. This was the last drop in my cup of agony, and I could bear no more. My senses seemed leaving me, and, as I sped along, I wildly prayed that my reason might not be dethroned.

My parents were anxiously waiting for me, but I brushed by them, and ran up stairs into my chamber. I shut the door and knelt by my bed. It was the attitude of prayer; but vainly, for a time, did I invoke its spirit.

Passion, fear, grief, and awakening doubts, rioted in my tortured brain. Long I knelt there, until a quietness came over me, and I could review the strange words of Arthur. He said religion had spoiled me, made me cold, proud, and self-righteous. Was it possible that religion had done this? I studied the past, and conscience arose with a thousand stings. O, truly I had nursed the empty form of religion, when the beautiful spirit, which should be indwelling, was unacknowledged and unfelt!

Tears gushed from my eyes, and I fervently implored divine forgiveness, assistance and guidance.

Still I retained my position, for I became too weak to rise, and my head grew giddy with sickening pain. I dimly remember the presence of my mother, and

how I was raised up and placed in bed. I felt a burning, rushing sensation in all my veins; a feeling of oppression and weakness came over me, and all consciousness was lost. A long blank followed.

When memory and reason resumed their empire, I lay upon my pillow, helpless as a new-born babe. I could not raise my hand or turn my weary head. I had been oblivious for many days; I knew it by the thin, pale features of my mother, bending fondly over me; I knew it by the added lines on my father's brow, and the sad expression of his face.

I asked no questions, but immediately relapsed into a dreamy slumber. Gradually the life-powers rallied; the nourishment placed to my lips was grateful to my taste, and an eloquent eye, and, now and then, a feeble word, expressed thanks for the constant and unremitting attentions of affection.

Then came sweet Mary Whitney, with step soft as the falling snow-flake, and her low and tender tones. Her refreshing presence was a cordial to my heart. Then Mr. Whitney was admitted to my chamber, — cheerful, genial, fresh as the morning. He always brought in sunshine with him, and left a bright ray for a token of his return.

As I grew stronger the memory of my sorrows returned with added power, and I was continually trying to analyze the counter elements which had

rent my heart and blunted my understanding. Arthur's words rung in my ears, — "Religion spoiled you; you became self-righteous." My eyes were opened to my real position as a Christian. I had been too much of a sectarian — too self-willed for a follower of Christ. I had been intolerant of opinion, narrow and selfish in my views. I began to realize how deeply I had wronged Alfred Eaton; how I had wounded the hearts of my parents.

I was filled with contrition, and resolved to be more yielding and compliant. Still, the all-important question of man's future destiny agitated my mind. Such mental disquiet retarded my recovery. Sometimes I cried out in anguish, "It is all dark, dark to me!"

Then upon the ear of my soul would sound, like half-remembered music, the dying words of Cora, "God is love." Her sweet serenity, the beautiful confidence with which she at last yielded up her spirit, would rise before me with a soothing influence. "God is love!" Upon this vast, delightful thought, I would allow my aching heart to rest for a moment. This bright point alone saved me from renewed delirium.

One day I was bolstered up by pillows, my father sitting behind me and supporting me with his strong arm.

"Marion," he said, "there is a preacher of your

faith in the neighborhood; if you wish, I will invite him to call upon you."

"Thank you, father, but I do not care to see a stranger. I am much pleased with Mr. Whitney, and would rather he would continue his visits."

There was a little silence, during which I strengthened myself for an acknowledgment. "Father, dear father, I have not regarded your wishes as I ought, nor have I been obedient in all things. I have had wrong views, for I believed that Christians were confined almost exclusively to one sect; now I know that all who love the Lord, and try to do his will, are Christians, whatever their name may be. I have learned this from Mr. Whitney, and am sorry for my bigotry and exclusiveness. Will you forgive me, father, for the pain I have occasioned you?"

In a tone of emotion he replied, "My child, it was all forgiven long ago."

"I knew it, father, even before I asked you; and now I am going to try to be a better Christian, and to be worthy of such a good father. But I can't think clearly; my mind is all in a whirl of confusion. I wish I could understand the plan of salvation!"

"My Marion, that is not necessary now; you are too weak to grapple with such a weighty subject. Wait until you are well, and then you can study for yourself. The life and teachings of Jesus will be a

perfect chart to guide you. For the present let your heart rest in God's love; endeavor to realize that he is your Almighty Father, and your anxiety will give place to a pleasing trust."

"O, how much better I feel! I am glad I have told you my troublesome thoughts, for I seem relieved and strengthened. Dear father, take away this pillow which is between me and your heart. There — let me rest my head upon your breast. Now, is not the little cloud between us vanished away, and am I not your own Marion again, — your only and dearest child?"

"My God, I thank thee for this hour!" he whispered, in a broken voice. I could feel the throbbings of the great heart against which I rested, and I knew that happy tears were falling on my head.

From that time I recovered more rapidly. My mind resumed its natural tone in proportion as my physical system became strengthened. I was surrounded by soothing and elevating influences. Books, and flowers, and music, with cheerful conversation, enlivened the tedium of convalescence.

My parents were all love and kindness, and Mr. and Mrs. Whitney constant in their attentions. And other friends, as they were gradually admitted, testified their affection in various ways.

I talked much about religion with my father and Mr. Whitney, and that tended to increase my seren-

ity, as all doctrinal points were avoided, and genuine religion, in all its loveliness, only dwelt upon. My heartfelt gratitude is due these friends for the delicacy and consideration manifested towards me.

This was what I needed — rest from all contested points; and, when I was fully restored to health, my mind was fresh and clear, and unaccountably free from the fetters which had trammelled it so shortly ago.

Once, in looking over a city paper, my eye was arrested by a name, — a dear familiar name, — Alfred Eaton! It was in a list of lectures given before a certain literary society. His lecture was pronounced both brilliant and useful, and his talents and moral worth commented upon with earnestness and evident sincerity. Coming tears quickly obscured the letters. This being, so noble, so worthy, I had deeply wronged. He had once loved, but now without doubt despised me. He would be happy, and honored of men, and I, alas, had not a single claim upon his affection or esteem!

This was the reöpening of a wound which could not be easily healed. "But it is a just punishment," I murmured, in bitter self-condemnation; "I deserve it all for my bigotry and passionate haste. I must make this great trial serve for my improvement and spiritual elevation. And I must crush

this love out of my heart; I must learn to read of him, to speak of him; and even to meet him, without emotion. Yes, yes; I must overcome myself, and, when he returns, Marion Lester shall meet him as a sister should a brother — as I should meet the only brother of my dear ascended Cora!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." PSALMS c. 4.

"Approach not the altar
With gloom in thy soul;
Nor let thy feet falter,
From terror's control!
God loves not the sadness
Of fear and distrust;
O, serve him with gladness—
The Gentle, the Just!"

F. OSGOOD.

A MORNING in June,—a Sabbath morn in June! Sweetest and holiest of all times! Earth wears a smile from heaven. Nature has donned her robe of loveliness. Everywhere innumerable tints of green flash in the bright sunlight, and the arching skies above are serenely, intensely blue. Each zephyr, as it floats along, bears on its wings perfume from the violet and rose; and the wild-wood songsters shout their loftiest anthems!

All nature is jubilant; and yet, methinks, there is a holy stillness on the air, for all sounds of mortal toil are hushed, and the "voice of God" speaks

audibly to the listening heart. The gushing sunshine has a mellower tinge, and the flickering, dancing foliage throws softer shadows on the green sward. The very air seems instinct with love and beauty!

Not a discordant element in nature, not a jarring chord in the "harp of life." Harmony within and without. 'T is the sabbath of the year — the sabbath of the soul!

On such a morn, and in such a frame of mind, did I repair to the temple of the Lord. I was now fully restored to health, and prepared to enter into all the active duties of life. My mother's face was wreathed in heartfelt smiles, and my father's eyes shone with a proud, rejoicing light. Leaning on his arm, I walked slowly up the aisle, and seated myself, as was my wont in former days, between him and my mother. My heart rose, and beat quickly, as I looked around the little church, from which I had been so long absent. How much of life I had learned since I last sat there! What sorrow, what tribulation, what humility!

Many eyes were turned upon me; some coldly, others curiously, and some in joyful surprise. From Mary Whitney, sitting in the minister's pew, I received a quick glance of affectionate approval. By her side was a young lady, radiant with smiles; I

had no difficulty in recognizing the beautiful Emma Benton.

In the same range with ours, was an empty pew. My eyes sought it involuntarily, and quickly did the rushing tide of memory cause them to overflow Where was the little classic head, with its wealth of shining hair falling 'neath a dainty hat, which I so oft had seen above the edge of the high-backed pew? Where my darling Cora, whose vacant seat looked so desolate to me then? Where was her gentle mother, who ever sat by her side? Where her noble, manly brother, with his earnest, upturned face? The pew was empty! Two of those beloved ones had joined the church of Christ on High, and one was far away, and forever estranged from me.

I drew down my veil, and let the heavy tears fall unrestrained. But there was no bitterness in my tears, no rebellion against the will of the Most High; it was only a natural outgushing of emotion, which could not be repressed.

I grew calmer as the services proceeded, and when Mr. Whitney announced his text, I could look up prepared to hear his words with composure. His theme was the "Mission of Christ," and not a word did I lose of the simple, truthful, soul-stirring discourse. I listened eagerly, almost breathlessly, as the vastness and sublimity of the subject were unfolded to my mind. The sermon was clear, concise, and

logical, proving the power and completeness of the scheme of salvation, and the certainty of the fulfilment of Christ's mission, which was "to seek and save that which was lost." He closed with a rapt, prophetical view of that glorious era when Christ's mediatorial reign shall have been accomplished; when, sin and death finished, he shall give up all things into the Father's hands, "that God may be all in all."

My mind was settled now; there would be no more fear, no more painful questioning for me. God would be all in all. Christ's mission would be accomplished! When, and how, and where, I cared not, in the blessed knowledge that it would be done in God's own time! The thought seemed to illuminate my mind and to vivify my heart.

I bowed my head upon my hands, lost to all outward things in the contemplation of the delightful theme. My soul seemed bathed, absorbed in light, and the breath of Eternal Love swept each sensitive chord of my being. I had never felt such nearness to God; such complete confidence in his changeless mercy.

New faith and hope budded and blossomed in my heart, the fruit of which, in after days, was saving food to my soul. I received such a baptism of joy that I felt I could never sorrow again as I had done. Death was no longer a grim spectre, but one of

God's good angels. And even that cruel separation from one still living, and still beloved, seemed now endurable. Now I never need fear for myself or any I love, for Jesus is sufficient for all!

I partially shook off the blessed revery, and raised my head. Mrs. Whitney stood by my side, quietly waiting for me. How long she had remained there I knew not, for the audience had entirely dispersed, and the sexton sat dozing by the door.

She took my arm with an expressive smile, and led me away. She understood me too well to jar upon my delicious musings with even the gentlest word, and we walked on in silence, and parted at the gate with a pressure of the hand, which meant more than words.

Once alone in my own room, I fell upon my knees, and my heart gushed forth in gratitude and praise!

CHAPTER XIX.

QUIET HAPPINESS. — UNEXPECTED JOY.

Two years flew by, on wings of quietness and peace. No one event stood out prominently from any other; but all the incidents of life seemed woven with silken threads.

My religious faith had grown and strengthened with me, and now it was a part of my very being. I was happy, and studied to make those around me taste the sweet cup too. Mrs. Whitney and her sister Emma were my dear and intimate friends. Emma was a child of nature, fresh and guileless in character. With Mary, religion was a living principle; with Emma, it was an impulse. I derived much pleasure and benefit from the society of these friends, for the observation of their practical virtues kept me continually reminded that religion was not a mere thing, but a life to live.

In the spring the Eaton cottage was opened, and the good aunt Fanny, before introduced to the reader, came to dwell in it. The garden was ploughed and

planted, and the flowering vines and shrubbery trimmed and watered. The long-neglected place smiled again in all its pristine beauty.

Mother Gossip reported that the owner was to return soon with a bride, and settle in his native place. I tried not to believe it; but, when Rumor concurred in what Gossip had said, I was forced to yield the point. I heard the tale with conflicting emotions, and yet tried to deceive myself into the belief that it was a matter of indifference to me. "Yes, I am glad of it," was my mental declaration, "for if he is married, he will meet me more frankly, and our old footing of friendship can be reëstablished." I actually thought I had so far overcome myself that I could live near Alfred Eaton, and on terms of friendship, without endangering my peace.

June wore again her coronal of roses, and proudly queened it over retiring spring. The first Sabbath in the month was bright and balmy, and a counterpart of the blessed day when the last trembling doubt lifted its shadow from my mind.

I had scarcely seated myself in meeting, when I was conscious that the Eaton pew, so long empty, was now occupied. Two young men were seated in it, and one was Alfred! My heart gave a bound, and then stood still. "How foolish to be so startled!" I said to myself, trying to regain the reins of self-government; but I could not. The sight of Alfred, so

unexpectedly, awakened a host of unpleasant memories. I did not hear a word of the sermon, nor was I fully recalled to myself until the minister rose to pronounce the benediction. Deeply conscience-stricken, I started to my feet, and lifted up my head in prayer for forgiveness.

And this, O, Marion, is your boasted self-conquest; this your victory over an affection long since worse than useless!

While passing out of the church I discovered that Alfred's companion was none other than Arthur Willis; but how changed in every expression! What serene elevation in his eye; what dignified composure in every motion! I had little time to speculate on his changed aspect, for he came directly to me with a cordial greeting.

I pressed him to go home with me and spend the intermission. He readily acquiesced, and, as Alfred was surrounded by welcoming friends, I passed along without a single glance or token of recognition.

After a few common-places, Arthur turned to me more earnestly: "We have both been changed since our last meeting. We have come out of darkness into marvellous light. Blessed be the name of the Lord!'

"Blessed be his name!" I repeated, softly, and deeply impressed. "I know that only the glorious light of the gospel could create such a happy change in you as your appearance indicates."

"You look at me inquiringly," he said, with a faint smile, "and I mean to gratify your natural curiosity without any questions."

He lowered his voice to its gentlest tones.

"After our painful interview by Cora's grave, I wandered for weeks from place to place, on the verge of madness. But the good God directed my steps, and brought his divine influence to bear upon my distracted mind. I met Alfred Eaton, and, knowing him to be the brother of our dear ascended Cora, I felt irresistibly drawn towards him. I confided all my sorrows to him, and from that time he has appeared to regard me with a brother's affection.

"O, such a friend as he has been to me! So faithful, so constant, and patient! Under God, I owe my present light and happiness to him."

My heart was thrilled with these praises of Alfred, but I could not speak.

Arthur went on.

"My new friend tried to heal my heart by religious counsel; but I cried out that he could not feel such sorrow as mine. He then told me of his own griefs, — how he had laid all his family in the silent grave. But I persisted that Cora was more dear to me than a parent or sister, — that he had never felt such love, and of course could hardly dream of such a sorrow. I was half shocked at the effect of my words, for his face was distorted with an expression

of anguish; and he turned it away and remained silent for a long time. When he at last looked up, he was calm, almost cheerful. 'To prove to you,' he said, 'that religious aspirations will comfort and strengthen you, I will tell you a little more about myself. Your beloved is taken from you by death, and mine, though still living, is as surely separated from me. I have taken back vows unfulfilled, and a disappointed affection stings my heart. But I am enabled to bear it, and to work for my fellow-men, and my own advancement. It is faith in God which sustains me.' I looked at Alfred reverently, yet no chord in my soul echoed to his words. I shall never forget his look of sorrow when he learned that I was a confirmed sceptic; but his ardor for my conversion, his indefatigable patience, conquered me at last. Slowly but surely my scepticism was uprooted, and faith planted in its place. I learned to love the Bible, to believe it; and every page was luminous with the love of the eternal Father."

He paused as if waiting for me to speak. My heart was full, and tears streaming from my eyes; but my belief that he was ignorant of my identity with the unworthy love of Alfred, gave me a slight degree of composure, and with difficulty I murmured a few words of sympathy.

"And now, though sorrow may overtake, though storms may encompass my path, I lean safely on the

everlasting rock; God is my shield, Jesus my refuge! I believe in God's love, — I feel it, I know it! And the least, the last of God's children shall one day know it; not as I do now, but in a glorious and beatified state! Great Father, hasten the time!"

He removed his hat, and stood looking upward. His soul, beaming through his eyes, seemed to pierce the azure into realms above. The breeze lightly lifted his midnight tresses from a brow of splendid proportions, and his lips were parted in the fervor of his emotions. Never had I seen a face expressing such spiritual elevation, such high-toned intellectuality.

A glow of gratitude warmed my breast, that a being so exquisitely gifted, so spiritually-minded, had not been long permitted to grope in the darkness of despair.

We were now at the door, and my father stood ready to welcome us.

I soon found, to my surprise and increased pleasure, that Arthur Willis had completed the study of divinity, and was now an ordained minister of the gospel of reconciliation and peace. When the bell rung for afternoon service, Mr. Whitney called to invite him to preach. After a little demurring, the young man consented, and the two ministers walked on in advance, leaving Mrs. Whitney and Emma to go with me. On the way I gave them a brief outline of my former acquaintance with the stranger gentle-

man. Emma thought it was a very romantic story; and, as she liked his looks so well, she was prepared to be pleased with his preaching.

I made amends for my previous abstraction by earnest and devout attention. I was instructed and deeply gratified. The speaker appeared to lose his identity; to entirely forget himself, in his ardent delineation of gospel truths. And this young man, so fearlessly proclaiming salvation, had once been tossed on speculative seas, and driven by bleak storms on to the shore of infidelity. But God had saved his bark from total wreck, and sent an angel to pilot him into the boundless ocean of truth. And now he stood before me, a man in the truest sense of the word. He had fought with fire and battled with tribulation, but now he rode above the clouds in an element of love and trust.

"O, bless the Lord for his loving-kindness!" I murmured many times that afternoon.

I had planted Cora's grave with her favorite wild flowers, taken from her own accustomed haunts; and nearly every day since the birth of the roses, I had twined a wreath about the head-stone. After meeting, I plucked the fairest buds in the garden and carried them to the sacred spot. "Alfred will see them," I thought, "and know that Cora is not forgotten or neglected."

After I had placed the wreath upon the spotless marble, and stood looking upon the fragrant mound with pleasing melancholy, I observed Alfred walking slowly towards me. Much as I desired to meet him, I shrank from him then and there, and turned to leave the spot by another walk. He divined my object, and, crossing over, intercepted me in my path.

He extended his hand, saying with his accustomed frankness, "Why do you avoid me, sister May?"

I had met him, — had heard his voice, and he had called me "sister May." My heart beat violently, and a sharp pang of disappointment shot through it. I would fain have passed by him, but I could not without positive rudeness. "Come, dear Marion, and sit down upon this stone; let us commune a little together." I sat down without a word, and trembled with emotion.

Alfred looked upon the wreath-crowned grave with glistening eyes. "I see Cora still lives in your affection," he said softly; "my heart thanks you for these sweet attentions."

I felt there was necessity for speaking, but my voice was constrained and low, as I said, "None knew Cora but to love her, and I who loved her so fondly can never forget her."

"No, no," he said, musingly; "those truly loved are never forgotten." He threw himself on the grass at my feet, and we were silent for a time; at last he

turned his face towards me very earnestly. "It is strange," he said, "when I have so yearned to see you, and thought I could never tell you all that is in my heart, that, now you are beside me, I can hardly speak at all."

"I believe it is often so when old friends meet. You have been absent a long time."

His eyes lighted. "Has it seemed long to you, Marion? Have you ever thought of me, or wished for my return? It has seemed an age to me, and if I had not had so much to do, I don't know how I could have got through with it all. O, Marion, I have never forgotten to dream of you — to pray for you — to love you! Do not turn your face away; let me read your eyes! If you have still any love for me, fear not to let your heart speak out, for I come offering my heart again, and praying for a return! Once you said we should be happiest apart; have we not both proved that a mistake, and will you not agree with me in saying that our best happiness will be found in each other's society?"

My heart beat wildly, tumultuously; my head grew giddy with excess of joy.

"Speak, dearest Marion, my Marion — I may call you so? Have not the clouds all passed from our horizon, and may not our hearts be reünited in a pure and Christian bond? Having loved you once, I can never cease to love. Now tell me, Marion, do I plead in vain?"

"O, Alfred, this is so much more than I expected — so much more than I deserve — I — I — "

"Tears, Marion! what do they mean?"

"They are tears of joy, Alfred. But I do not deserve this happiness — I do not deserve it!"

"Not deserve it! Assured of your love, I am the happiest man in the country! Give me your hand, Marion, in token of our renewed pledge."

I gave him my hand; it was clasped fervently and pressed to his heart. "Now, in the presence of God our Father — in this sacred spot where repose the ashes of my kindred — in memory of her, who clasped our hands above her dying pillow, and prayed that our hearts might be reünited as were our hands — do we pledge anew our love and our fidelity! No storms, nor sunshine, nor pride of opinion, nor even death itself, shall ever divide our spirits now! Do you accept the vow?"

"I do!"

"Then may the Great Father smile upon us in this hour, and sanctify to our good the trials we have passed through!"

The solemnity of his words tempered with awe the happiness gushing over my soul. Our joy was too deep and indwelling for expression; therefore we sat a long time without speaking. But after a while I began to question him.

"Why, Alfred, loving me as you say you do, did you remain away so long?"

"Don't chide me, Marion; I will explain it all. For months after leaving here I felt desolate and alone. Believing that we were forever separated, I tried to forget you. I studied hard, and was noticed and patronized in the literary world. I tried to banish your image from my heart in the pleasures of ambition, but in vain. Then I gradually became possessed of the belief that time would overcome your unworthy prejudices; and that your questioning mind would never rest until it found the sure and steadfast anchor — God's love. Many times have I been on the point of flying to you, to impart to you all my hopes and wishes; but my better judgment prevailed. I would not run the risk of a disappointment, until you had had time to learn your own heart; until your mind had fully outgrown the effects of that desolating storm of fear and darkness.

"Imagine my pleasure, then, when, on returning, I read in the beautiful serenity of your face the peace of the spirit. I knew at a glance that your soul had been deeply baptized in the religion of love. But when many tongues joined to praise you, — to tell of your patience, and charity, and Christian meekness, — my heart almost failed me. I feared you had risen so much above and superior to me, that I could never call you mine. But, thank God, you are my own Marion again; and brighter, purer, dearer than ever!"

Upon his shoulder I wept my joy. Yet conscience would not take the half of his praise; "but I will try, I will try to be worthy of it all!" was my mental resolve.

At that moment Arthur Willis stepped lightly before us. I started in blushing confusion. "Excuse me if I am intruding," said Arthur.

"No intrusion, my friend," said Alfred, in his own hearty manner; "you have come at a happy moment. The heart which I once lost is given again into my keeping, and I hold it as a priceless treasure. Marion is my affianced, — mine and only mine."

Arthur smiled brightly. "I congratulate you both with my whole heart. May nothing ever mar your present happiness. Trial has purified and elevated your affections, and you are the happier for the storm. It is thus our heavenly Father worketh all things for our good. Let us trust in Him always."

His words and tones seemed more natural to him who has trod life's path many years, than to one just on the threshold of manhood; but I felt that they sprung fresh from his heart. Then he turned and looked long upon Cora's flowery grave. I expected to see his brow overshadowed, and his features convulsed. But the smile spread over his face until it was illumined with the light of the soul.

"This wreath," he said, pointing to the chaplet of flowers, yet turning his gaze upward, "is a sweet em-

blem of the crown of immortality encircling her brow. Angelic Cora! I fancy her spirit floats on that rosy cloud, just above the portal where the sun goes in to rest; and, now I close my eyes, I feel her holy presence close to my heart!"

I was overcome, and from the fount of tenderness fresh tears gushed forth. A warm drop fell on my hand, over which Alfred bent his head.

Arthur, his soul borne upon wings of faith, forgot our presence. He went on in a sort of rapture: "Once I wailed in black despair, the blighting of my heart's idol; now Cora is my star crowned in heaven! ever guiding, ever leading me upward!"

O, Cora! Though loved and cherished on earth, how much more beautiful and precious in heaven! Thy life could never have accomplished what thy death hath already done. Thy star, rising higher and higher, draweth upward, still upward, the hearts of those clinging to thee! Darkness and gloom are banished from the portal through which thou hast flown, and Christ himself brightened the way for thee!

"O, morn celestial! where the sun
Is needed not to make the day.
The glories of th' Eternal One,
God, shall light the place alway!
And moon and stars give not their light;
That morn shall never fade in night;
And Faith and Hope I 'll need no more
On Love's own amaranthine shore!"

CHAPTER XX.

LIGHT COMETH FORTH FROM DARKNESS.

"But this is over. Light hath visited
Her winter-shrouded spirit. Night and day
Her eye is riveted upon the page
Which yielded peace and everlasting life;
And she hath found it.
Up in her breast
Hath sprung mysterious strength. The ills of life
Are passed from her remembrance. She doth live,
And move, and have her being, in the light
Of God's eternal presence: and the fears
Of death and hell have now no place within
Her heaven-instructed soul."

JULIA H. SCOTT.

THE curtain is lifted again after a lapse of five years. Alfred and I live happily in our little cottage, crowned with peace and plenty. Good aunt Fanny is my housekeeper, and an indispensable member of our family.

These years have touched lightly the principal characters of our story. I can count a few more gray hairs on my father's head, and an added wrinkle here and there; and mother has taken to wearing

caps and spectacles; but over their faces there is a peaceful lustre radiated from hearts quietly happy.

Mr. Whitney still breaks the bread of life to a united and prospering flock. He is honored and beloved, and his wife, the sharer of his toils and pleasures, has a place in many hearts. Their home is brightened with the presence of Emma Benton, who is as gay and light-hearted, and withal as beautiful and good, as in early girlhood.

Arthur Willis ministers to a large society in a neighboring city. He is a very useful and popular man, but he cares little for fame only as a means of being useful in a wider sphere of action. He is true to his integrity, and his heart is still untouched by earthly ambition. He preaches "Christ and Him crucified," and salvation to the world, with increasing sincerity and ardor. Though Cora's star is still reflected in the holiest mirror of his heart, he feels the need of an earthly companion. He has wooed and won Emma Benton. The dear girl just whispered in my ear that but six months will elapse ere she will be led to the altar by the noble and gifted Arthur Willis. Peace and prosperity attend them!

Alfred's business called him into the Empire State, and, as it was in the height of the Saratoga season, I decided to accompany him to that far-famed watering-place. We planned to go directly to Saratoga,

where Alfred would leave me, and, after the disposal of his business, return and spend a few days; after which we were to make a leisurely homeward tour.

I invited Emma Benton to go with us, which invitation was accepted with enthusiasm. After a delightful journey we arrived at the Springs in high health and spirits. One day was spent in pleasant walks and drinking of the water, which, of course, we pronounced very delicious, and superior to any other, and then Alfred left us, saying he "must work before he played." He bade us be as happy as we might, and Emma assured him that that would be happy enough, for, in that beautiful place, with each other's society, and books and pencils, she thought a month might pass away before even the charm of novelty would be worn off.

The following morning was bright beyond compare. I was ready for a walk, but Emma had fallen in love with the landscape seen from a certain point, and I could not coax her from the window. She would get her drawing materials, and, after she had sketched the outlines of the pretty scene, would walk with me wherever I pleased. So I concluded to submit with a good grace, and declared my intention to take my note-book and go down in the public parlor, or walk on the piazza.

She laughingly called after me to study the faces well, for I might display my sagacity by picking

out the heroes and poets, or great characters of any sort.

I replied, in the same vein, that human nature was the best study in the world, and where could I find it more diversified than at Saratoga?

But, though there were a number of richly-dressed people in the parlor, there was nothing remarkable about them, and I fell to musing, now and then dreamily tracing a line or two in my note-book. Once my eyes wandered through the open window upon the piazza, and I suddenly became interested. A female, with a small and delicate figure, walked slowly back and forth, leading a three-year-old boy by the hand. The lady was dressed in the deepest mourning,—not in silks and tasteful laces, but gloomy serge,—and a long crape veil hid her face. She was evidently in deepest sorrow, and I felt instinctively that it was grief, not years, which bowed her form.

She formed a touching contrast to the gayly-dressed butterflies of fashion flitting hither and thither.

I watched her with painful interest.

The little boy spoke in a plaintive voice, and the lady, partially raising her veil, bent to hear. I caught a momentary glimpse of her face, and immediately recognized the pale but familiar features. It was Miss Ingols, or rather Mrs. Delano.

Shortly after my marriage, I had received a letter

from her, informing me of her union with Mr. Delano, and of their removal to the west. I immediately replied with affectionate congratulations, and told her of my own marriage and happy change of faith. I had never heard from her since then, nor had I heard of the decease of Mr. Delano; still I needed not to be told that she was a widow, and her child an orphan.

I stepped to the door, that she might have a chance to recognize me. She paused, and, raising her veil, looked at me earnestly. I went towards her, smiling; "If I am not mistaken," she said, in a trembling voice, "this is Marion Lester."

"No, you are not mistaken," said I, "and I have the pleasure of meeting my old friend and teacher."

She caught my outstretched hand, and deluged it with tears.

"Excuse me," she said, "for I cannot help it. I am very nervous, and the least thing overcomes me. And I am very glad to see you, dear Marion, or perhaps I ought to say, Mrs. Eaton."

"O, no! let me be Marion to you still. Mrs. Eaton is too formal for old friends."

She smiled; but, O, it was more mournful even than her tears!

"You are unchanged, I see; you look as bright and happy, and almost as girlish, as when I first

knew you. But I — I — am desolate, and alone!" Again a shower of grief choked her words.

We were attracting too much attention from curious loungers, and Mrs. Delano invited me into her private room, where we could be secure from intrusion. She looked like a confirmed invalid as she leaned back in her chair, as if exhausted. Her features were very pale and thin, and, if I had thought their expression touchingly mournful in other days, it was now one of bitter despair.

The little boy seated himself demurely at her feet, and folded his small hands with strange quietness. He had his father's fine features and lofty forehead, and his mother's deep hazel eyes, with all their sorrowful light. He was not eager and restless like other children, but prematurely grave and thoughtful.

"And this is your little boy?" I asked, wishing for something to say.

"Yes; this is my little fatherless child," she replied, laying her hand on his bright locks.

"What do you call him?"

"Roland."

There was deep meaning in the quivering tones, and in the sudden veiling of those mournful eyes.

I thought, with a gush of emotion, which I could scarce repress, how, in the first joy of mother-love, she had not forgotten him whose sudden and terrible

death had poured night into her young soul, but had given his name to her precious babe. She called him "Roland!"

How expressive of never-dying affection — of still living sorrow!

"Roland, dear, you may go down stairs and play a little while; mamma wants to talk with her friend."

The child looked into her agitated face, not wonderingly, but pityingly and appreciatingly, I thought, and slowly and reluctantly left the room.

"The dear little fellow is so timid and bashful," said the mother, gazing after him with fond emotion, "that I have to force him from my side sometimes. He never runs about and plays like other children. I wish he would."

"He is a beautiful child, but he looks delicate."

"He is feeble; and it is more on his account than my own that I am here, though the doctors told me the spring waters would be beneficial to me. But I don't see any improvement, and the gayety and bustle of so much company are very annoying. I feel there is no cure for me — no balm for my wounded heart. I told you my little Roland was fatherless!"

"Yes," I replied, struggling with tears; "you are desolate and bereaved; but time will heal the wounds of your heart, as you must have faith in the happiness of your departed friend."

"O, Marion, Marion, it is not that I am a widow — it is not that I am bereaved, that my spirit is broken! Much as I mourn for my good husband, much as I miss his society, I could learn to bear that, believing he is called and chosen of God; but my little Roland has no one to guide and teach him now! Sometimes I think I have doomed him by giving him that name. It was a fatal, idolatrous love which did it!"

"My dear friend! God is the father of the fatherless."

"I know it; but think of the responsibility resting upon me! How can I teach his young spirit — how can I show him the way of salvation, when my own feet have faltered and led me into folds of darkness?"

"Why do you so underrate yourself? You can teach your child love and obedience, as you have instructed many other young spirits."

"Ah, Marion, when you knew me I had a Christian's hope; now I feel I have no part or union with God's own!"

She looked at me with such a fixed, despairing gaze, that I was petrified.

"When my baby was born," she continued, with that same dreadful look, "the forced calmness I had worn so long was broken up. I have been nervous, erratic, half-crazed ever since. I know God is angry

with me, and has turned the light of his countenance far away from me, for I have rebelled against his decrees. My heart has never ceased to cry Roland! Roland! — and now fears for my little Roland fill up the measure of my woe. Poor, unfortunate child of an unworthy mother!"

Her features suddenly contracted, and tears rained in torrents from her eyes. I folded her slight form in my arms; I held her poor, crushed heart close to my own warm, happy one, and pressed my lips to her pure forehead many times, ere I could speak.

"It is a dreadful thing, this want of faith."

"Yes, it is dreadful," she repeated; "and tears are all the privilege left me. I have wept the fountain dry many times."

"My poor friend, you think God is wearied with your ceaseless prayers for the salvation of your Roland; it cannot be so. 'His mercy is everlasting. His mercy endureth forever.' 'He chastenеth whom He loveth.'"

"He is merciful, but I have tried him too long. Still, for myself alone I would not groan and strive so much. If I only knew that my little boy would grow up good, and be accepted of the Lord, I believe I could be comparatively happy."

"'Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord!' Jesus took little children in his arms and blessed them, saying, 'of such is the kingdom of heaven.' If God so

loves and cares for your child now, do you think, as soon as he becomes a man (which is only to be a child of a little larger growth), He will leave him entirely to himself? Rather believe he will ever be encircled in the arms of Infinite Love!"

Her features took a more quiet tone, and she remained silent and thoughtful. When she spoke again, it was in a more natural manner. "I believe I do wrong to worry so much about the future; I suppose it is wicked, but I am sure the sin brings its own bitter punishment."

"It does indeed! and, as you are so bitterly punished here for this sin of distrust, do you think the merciful Father in heaven would punish you still more dreadfully, and forever, for this same error? I cannot believe it!"

She passed her hand over her forehead with a puzzled air, and was silent. Seeing that she was almost fainting with weariness, I persuaded her to lie on the bed. I was about leaving her when she begged me to call in her little boy.

The child stood at the door patiently waiting for admission. He came in softly, and took a seat by the side of the bed. His mother put out her hand, which he took in both of his own, and laid his little cheek caressingly upon it. Deeply affected, I turned away.

Emma was wondering and almost alarmed at my

prolonged absence. When I explained the cause of it she was affected to tears. And yet she could not realize, as I could, the desolation in the heart of the mourner. After dinner we started for a romantic stroll. Emma suggested taking the little Roland Delano with us. Pleased with the proposition, I stepped in to ask his mother's permission. It made my heart ache to see the little fellow sitting, just as I had left him, in that darkened, stifled room.

Mrs. Delano was glad to have Roland go with us, as the air and exercise might do him good. But the child manifested no pleasure, and I saw that he would prefer to remain in-doors, though he made no opposition as I led him away.

Emma caught him up in her arms, calling him a little darling; she kissed him, and playfully pinched his cheeks, "to make them a little red," she said.

The child smiled; but it was the reflection of his mother's smile, and I could not bear it.

"What a strange smile for such a child, a mere babe!" exclaimed Emma. "Why, my little man, if I don't find something to make your eyes shine, and your cheeks rosy,—something to make you laugh right out, — I shall think you are a fay, or sprite, — anything but a child!"

She plied him with sugar-plums and kisses; I told him stories and sung him songs; and we both played hide-and-seek under the trees, until his laugh rung

out clear and childlike. Between us both he was in danger of being killed with kindness; but Emma accomplished her object, and I had the satisfaction of taking Roland back to his mamma, with bright eyes, glowing cheeks, and hands crowded with wild flowers.

Mrs. Delano raised her head with a languid smile as we entered. Roland's face became shaded, and he walked forward with hushed footsteps. I could not bear to have his unwonted joy reäct upon him so soon, and withal I was determined to give a wholesome lesson to his repining mother.

"Have n't you rested long enough, Mrs. Delano? Let me help you up — there. This is a very easy rocking-chair, and this is a pretty footstool, only it is too dark to see the working plainly." I raised the curtain and put up the window, letting in a flood of light, and a gush of music from a warbler trilling on a tree near by. "Is n't this pleasant? Air and light are precious gifts of Heaven!"

Mrs. Delano covered her face. "Don't, Marion, don't! Do put down that curtain! I can't bear light, and music, and beauty; — they mock me; they jar upon my spirit!"

"Don't you think you can bear light, and beauty, and music, better than your little boy can endure gloom, and sadness, and silence?"

Though I spoke very gently, she comprehended my full meaning, and looked up quickly with a flushed

brow. I smiled seriously, and her eyes fell. She drew her child to her bosom. "O, I am selfish, very selfish after all, in the face of my absorbing love for thee, my little Roland!"

I saw tear-drops glisten on the child's fair tresses.

"This will never do, Mrs. Delano! I am going to be mistress here for a little while, and I shall be very peremptory, I fear. Roland, dear, just take your flowers to the window, and make a nice bouquet of them. To-morrow I will buy you a pretty little vase, and you shall fill it every day with flowers, to put upon your mamma's table."

The child flew like a humming-bird, and in half a minute was clapping his hands, and mocking the singer, whose heaven-taught song had so offended his mother's morbid ear.

"I have found a good medicine for Roland,"—she looked up expectantly,—"sunshine and gladness!"

"Thank you, dear Marion," she said, with quivering lip; "you have taught me a needed lesson!"

I combed out her long tresses, and, while braiding them, I chatted cheerfully of my own happy home, and of all the blessings surrounding my path; of sweet Emma Benton, whom I would introduce to her to-morrow; of our pleasant walk, and Roland's childish glee. I pointed out the exquisite landscape, seen from the window, which she had never looked at before.

Her eye brightened, and her voice borrowed a cheerful tone from mine.

But soon her old look came back again, and she said, with a sigh, "I wish I might enjoy all this beauty of nature and sweetness of life!"

"O, my dear friend! has not God given you eyes to see, and ears to hear; and will you be wilfully blind and deaf? You have a mind fitted to appreciate the beauties of nature and glories of art; you have a heart sensitive to social joy and religious bliss; and why, why can you not enjoy all the beauty and sweetness of life?"

"I wish I could feel it all just so; but I can't! There is a cloud all 'about me, and it is dark, very dark!"

"That is because your eyes are shut, and your mind wrapped in itself. Look up, my friend; open your eyes, and you will see God's love gilding even the cloud above you. The darkness is all in yourself."

"I don't dare to have you talk to me in that way, Marion; for now I remember that even you, in whom so many hopes were centred, have turned away from the God of our salvation, and rest in your own strength!"

"Not so! It is entirely on God's strength that I rest! My faith and hope are enlarged and purified.

The God in whom I trust is a God of salvation, and the Saviour I adore is sufficient for all!"

She looked at me dubiously.

I went on with enthusiasm. "Once I sought religion because I feared to be without it; now it attracts and engrosses my soul because it is in itself so precious and desirable! My religion is one of love and beauty and gladness. I can think of no sorrow so terrible, that this glorious faith can not soften and make endurable!"

"Your words are pleasant; I like to hear them, but I ought not. I fear they will mislead me."

"Can you be worse off than you are now, when you are shrouded in darkness and gloom? But I will not sermonize any more, or you will really get to be afraid of me. Good-night, and sweet dreams to you! I shall not forget your flower-vase, little one. Good-night."

A few visitors took their meals in private, but Emma and I liked best the sociability of the common table. One day, at dinner, in glancing down the long vista of faces, at the further end were two familiar ones. A thrill of pleasure quickened my pulses as I recognized my old school-mates, Edwin Sanders and Helen French. Helen had ripened into a beautiful woman, and Edwin was a fine-looking man.

Soon Helen's flashing, restless eyes met my earnest gaze; she started with a bright color, and bending her head, which had the same coquettish, wilful turn, as of old, whispered a word to her companion. Then I had to endure a whole battery of glances; but I only smiled quietly and happily to myself, and went on with my dinner. As soon as the repast was over, they hastened towards me, and I smilingly held out both hands.

"It is she! it is Marion Lester!" cried Helen, flinging her arms about my neck, and kissing me in transport.

Edwin was equally pleased at the meeting, though he expressed his pleasure more suitably to the dignity of a gentleman.

"O, Helen French! I should know you anywhere in the wide world! You have not altered one bit!"

"Now, now," said Edwin, "I shall not allow my bride to be called by her maiden name any longer. Let me introduce Mrs. Sanders to you. We were married last week, and this is our bridal tour!"

I bowed low, and touched the bride's jewelled fingers to my lips, in mock gravity. Then there was a flood of questions, and answers, and exclamations, quite discouraging to Emma, who soon excused herself, saying she must finish shading her picture. Edwin declared he could not get in a word edgeways, and he would leave us until our torrent of small talk was somewhat abated.

We were glad to be left alone, and talked as only old school-mates can talk after a long separation.

"Where 's your sister Sarah?" I asked at length; "I almost forgot to inquire about her."

"O, she is married and settled down in M——. She has two little children, and has become quite matronly."

"How I should like to see her! Has she married well?"

"Yes, her husband is a professor, and that suits her, of course. She is just the same dear, good girl that she used to be, only she preaches to me so much about getting religion. And O, Marion! who would have thought that you, of all others, would backslide and become one of the world again? I do say, it almost took my breath away when I heard it; and Sarah could n't believe it at first; but, when Miss Ingols told her, she had to. And then the poor girl half cried her eyes out. She and Miss Ingols would n't either of 'em have mourned as much if they had heard of your death; though, for my part, I could n't see anything so very terrible about it."

I laughed heartily at Helen's graphic story, and sought to correct an erroneous opinion. "They did n't need to mourn so much, for I loved real religion more than ever. I only enlarged the borders of my faith, and took in all God's children."

Helen shook her head laughingly. "I don't know

about that sort of religion; I have heard of it, and it is dangerous. They say 'it will do to live by, but is n't good to die by.'"

"And is your religion good to die by, Helen?"

"My religion; ha, ha, ha! that is a good one! I have n't the least bit of religion about me, though I suppose I must have before I die. Edwin and I have agreed to take the world easy, and enjoy all we can; then, you know, when we are growing old, we can get religion a great deal better than now."

"My dear Helen, how much you will lose! Religion is a life to live, not a thing to get!"

Helen made a wry face. "I cannot live religion; I should get tired to death of it! My plan is the best, I'm sure; for if you live your religion, and don't get the right sort, after all, you 'll be in dreadful danger. Don't look so sober, May!"

"I can't help it, and I don't believe the religion you talk about getting some time is good to die by; and I am sure Miss Ingols (she is Mrs. Delano now) has proved it bad to live by."

"Mrs. Delano," said Helen, as if glad to change the conversation, "where is she?"

"She is in this house, and in the deepest sorrow. Her husband is dead!"

"Poor, poor thing!"

"Yes, Helen, she is an object of pity. Her husband is dead; she has lost her religious hope, and

thinks she is doomed; and she is in agonizing fear about the salvation of her child."

"Miss Ingols! impossible! Why, if she is n't going to heaven, I don't know who will! What puts such horrible ideas into her head?"

"It is the fruit of that religion which you are going to get to die by, Helen! But won't you go and see the poor thing? She would be pleased to meet you."

"No, I would n't see her for the world! It would do her no good, and I 'm sure I should n't get over it in a month! I can't bear to see any one that is so melancholy, and I don't want anything to make me sad on my bridal tour. We are only going to stay until to-morrow; so pray don't let her know we are here. Here comes Edwin; — he would be surprised if he knew what a gloomy subject we have got on to."

The young gentleman came up with a playful remark, which put all our grave thoughts to flight, and a long, happy conversation ensued.

On the morrow, when I was waiting to see my friends off, and expressing regret at the shortness of their stay, Helen exclaimed, with a saucy shake of her bright little head, "Don't put so much solicitude in your black eyes, Marion! Ed and I will get along well enough, and will look out to get religion in good time; so never fear for us."

"I was only thinking what a pity it is that my

two friends, walking through a flowery vale, should only see the common flowers beneath their feet, and be blind to the rare and fragrant blossoms growing higher up, yet within their reach."

"You are getting to be poetical," laughed Edwin; and yet I saw I had awakened a new thought, and was glad the words were spoken.

"Marion, I do believe there is some sense in your doctrine, after all. I thought about it last night until my head ached. I do hope it is true; I do hope so. *Mon chere ami!* But, after all, I believe I'll stay on the safe side, ha, ha! Good-by, good-by, dear! Come and see me when you can!"

"Good-by, Helen; good-by, Edwin!"

While tossing kisses through the open window, I lost sight of Helen's sparkling, piquant face, which only needed an indwelling happiness to make it truly beautiful. Though she was full of glee, the joy was on the surface, for the deep, deep fountains of her nature were yet unsealed, and she was ignorant even of their existence. Alas! what a waste of God's best gifts!

O, the fruit of this false, mistaken faith! how bitter it is! It is blight and mildew to some spirits; and others, less sensitive and more elastic, it frightens away from the fountains of life!

Before Alfred came, I had obtained great influence over the mind of Mrs. Delano. She was more serene

and cheerful, and I began to believe that the Lord in his great mercy would send her the Comforter. I had no difficulty in enlisting Alfred's sympathies for my unfortunate friend. He sought to win her confidence and esteem by kind and brotherly attentions; and his earnest, truthful words, so fitly spoken, awoke a new and profitable train of thought. She ceased to fear, and then learned to respect, our peculiar faith, as her absurd ideas of it were exchanged for those more truthful.

We invited her to accompany us home and spend a few months. She had many scruples at first, but little Roland helped me to overrule them. The child was delighted at the thought of living with aunt Marion, as he called me, and pleaded with his mother with childish volubility and eloquence. She consented at last, saying she needed the influence of just such a quiet and happy home as she knew ours must be, to restore her to health and serenity.

"And to happiness, my friend!"

"Nay, Marion, I may become resigned, but never happy!"

"I have hopes even of that blessed contingency."

"You are a bright prophetess, Marion, and you look almost like one inspired, with that radiant light in your eye! But your extravagantly large 'hope' accounts for it all."

"If it is extravagant, I shall cherish it, that your hope may be increased and strengthened by it."

I allotted the pleasantest room in the house to Mrs. Delano. Honeysuckles peeped in at the windows, and my choicest verbena, and rose-bush, and stately calla, stood on a little antique stand. The drapery of the bed and windows was white, and the glowing colors in the carpet contrasted pleasantly with the delicate wall-paper. Altogether, it had a cheerful, cosey, home look, and the flash of pleasure and gratitude overspreading Mrs. Delano's pale brow, as she first entered it, amply repaid me for my endeavors to please her.

I took care to place religious books upon her table; some to comfort and elevate her heart, and others to direct and enlighten her mind. These were read at first, but soon her Bible engrossed her whole attention.

> "Night and day
> Her eye was riveted upon the page
> Which yieldeth peace and everlasting life."

And, O, how fervently I prayed that she might find it!

As days passed on, her eye grew brighter, and her voice firmer. Health breathed kindly upon her enfeebled frame, and her step became elastic; and once I caught her humming snatches of a song!

Meanwhile little Roland thrived wonderfully in the country air and sunshine. His cheeks grew round and ruddy, and his hesitating, mournful man-

ners were exchanged for genuine childish exuberance and joy. He became a dear and treasured member of the family, stealing into our affections with that sweet audacity so well known to the little ones.

One night, at sunset, Mrs. Delano and Alfred and I were in the garden, enjoying its fragrance and beauty. Alfred stooped to bind up a broken flower, so that the mellow light fell full upon his manly brow. It seemed to give it a lofty, spiritual expression. Mrs. Delano felt it as well as I.

"Mr. Eaton, I believe you are a true Christian!" she said, suddenly.

"Do you?" said Alfred, with a half smile. "Thank you!"

"I wish you would give me your definition of religion."

Alfred thought a minute, and replied, "Love to God and to man!"

"Is that all?"

"Is not that enough? Does it not include all? If the heart is deeply imbued with love, where is there room for sin? Selfishness and hatred, and bigotry and passion, cannot dwell with heavenly love."

Mrs. Delano looked down, musingly. "The world is full of sin and discord, and I don't see how it is all going to be made harmonious with love. I don't see how every soul can become pure and holy."

"But God does!—he who sees the end from the

beginning. We are weak and ignorant, but God is infinite in wisdom. 'His ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts.' O, believe, with me, that the divine Architect of the universe hath power to accomplish an all-perfect and glorious result!"

"O, this happy faith! I would it were mine!" cried Mrs. Delano, raising her streaming eyes upward.

The truth was striving in her heart.

The seed of truth, dropped at the right moment, and with a skilful hand, will oftentimes have more effect than whole years spent in doctrinal argumentation.

"Mamma," said little Roland, "are we going to live here always? I love this pretty home; I love aunt Marion! Say, can't we stay here always?"

"Ask aunt Marion if we may?"

"May we live here always, auntie?"

"Certainly, darling! As long as you and your mamma are contented here I shan't let you go away."

"O, good, good!" cried the little fellow, clapping his hands. "I 'll run and tell Willie Edson I 'm going to keep this good home, and he 'll be glad too!" And away he darted like a bird on the wing.

"The medicine you once prescribed for Roland has done wonders," said Mrs. Delano. "Yes, 'sunshine and gladness' are precious remedies."

"Roland is a gleam of sunshine himself, and his heart is all gladness! But, my dear friend, you are

reading and thinking too much; rest a little while." I tried to remove the open Bible from her lap, but she retained it, saying, gently, "Let me keep it always in my sight, Marion, for it is 'a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.'"

A heartfelt smile illumined her features. I had never seen such a smile upon her face before, and sweet hope sent a quivering wave down to the centre of my heart.

"O, this blessed, blessed book! Marion, I have read it all my days, but never with such eyes as I do now! It seems a new and glorious revelation. 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!'"

"And now you see light, even through the cloud above you?"

"Marion, the cloud is entirely gone. It is light all around me. Doubt and fear have fled away, and hope and joy come trooping in their places. The great wound in my heart is healed. I know that my loved and gone before are basking in the blaze of Infinite Love; I feel a portion of it warming and thrilling every nerve of my being!"

Tears of joy ran over my face, but hers wore a look of holy elevation; and I knew that the Comforter nestled in her heart!

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